THE FAITH OF A MODERN PROTESTANT

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"WHAT IS RELIGION"

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THE FAITH OF A MODERN PROTESTANT

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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TRANSLATED BY F. B. LOW

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The Faith of a Modern Protestant

BY

WILHELM BOUSSET

PROFESSOR IN THE UNIVERSITY OF GÖTTINGEN

AUTHOR OF "WHAT IS RELIGION?"

TRANSLATED BY F. B. LOW

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

So much interest was awakened over here by Professor Bousset's "What is Religion?" that it is believed that many readers will welcome a translation of the present little book which, while complete in itself, forms in some sort a sequel to the earlier work.

In "What is Religion?" Dr. Bousset gave us a survey of the religious evolution of mankind, showing how that development finds its culmination and crown in Christianity. In the present work he seeks to show what Christian faith, belief in the Fatherhood of God as proclaimed by Jesus Christ, means for mankind to-day, how it gives the only firm foundation to life, and lifts us above the transitory to the eternal.

The book is not so much an argument for the existence of God as a confession of faith and an appeal to the conscience and the will. It might, in fact, almost be described as an elaboration of St. Augustine's profound saying, *Tu nos fecisti ad Te, et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in Te.* Religion is here approached from the side of vital spiritual experience; it is viewed, not as a result of metaphysical inquiry, but as a per-

sonal venture, a reaching out of faith into the unknown, a contact of the human will with that Divine Will which is our peace.

Dr. Bousset's insistence on personality links him to some extent with the characteristic philosophy of our day, the "Pragmatism" which is largely a return to the "practical reason" of Kant; it links him also on the religious side with the Father of the Reformation, Martin Luther. The son of a Lutheran pastor, Dr. Bousset, although his views have passed far beyond the limits of orthodox Evangelicalism, belongs in a very real sense to the Protestant tradition. In its intense, some may think its excessive, individualism, its emphasis on personal experience of redemption, justification, and forgiveness, this book shows plainly the influence of Luther; indeed, its teaching seems a natural and legitimate development of Lutheranism, in harmony with the intellectual environment of our time.

And the forcible directness of Bousset's style, his eloquence born of conviction, above all his buoyant faith in the ultimate Goodness behind all the seeming contradictions of the world, make one think of Luther. *Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott*—these words sound the keynote of the book.

C. M.

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THE FAITH OF A MODERN PROTESTANT

INTRODUCTION

IN every religion belief in God, or to express it from a more universal point of view, belief in the gods, in the Godhead, is the central idea. Where this is not so, as in the exceptional case of the earliest form of Buddhism, we have to deal with an attenuated religion, permeated with a philosophic conception of the world.

Our object in this little book is to try to define, by comparison, the peculiar position and the characteristic qualities of our belief—that is to say, of the Christian belief in God—so far as it concerns the religious life of mankind, and thus to comprehend the essential character of the Christian religion. At the same time we must put the question as to the nature of the Christian belief in God. In the history of Christianity we are confronted with an enormous variety of forms, and among the ever-varying phenomena we

must seek to discover the permanent and the essential. We do this by directing our glance backwards to the creative starting-point of this religion, to the life of Jesus of Nazareth, and also by studying the innumerable forms and expressions through which that seed reached its development, as well as the long list of heroes of the Christian faith. But we cannot avoid putting our own subjectivity into this stream of living events and asking the question wherein lies the power of the Christian belief in God, which works on us, or can and must work on us. Yet we ask the question in such a way that we do not regard our subjectivity as sovereign and alone decisive. We are prepared in the plenitude of historical experience constantly to correct our own point of view, voluntarily, without any external compulsion laid upon us by authority.

All religious life, however, consciously or unconsciously, is linked to definite, personal needs, difficulties and problems which touch most deeply our inmost being, our individual ego. Faith frees us from these difficulties, and gives an answer to the problems of life. Thus it is with the Christian faith in God. We listen both to the anxious questioning which arises from our souls, and to the answer which our faith in God gives us.

CHAPTER I

THE QUESTION STATED

WE human beings find ourselves with our whole life and being a part of an universal existence, and we ask ourselves concerning our relation to this existence, and the meaning of our life in it. We put that existence on the one hand and our life on the other. And the first feeling that comes to us—especially to us modern men—is the tremendous feeling of our own insignificance, powerlessness, and dwarf-like nature. The men of the ancient world could banish this feeling. Secure and firm, the earth rested at their feet, in the centre of the universe, surrounded by the constellations. Over it rose the brazen arch of heaven, and above, not too far off, dwelt the gods, the Godhead. The man of the ancient world could still feel himself lord on the globe, and so could think of defying the gods and laughing at them. And when death approached him,

he saw children and grandchildren—a long series of generations who should rule the earth even as he had done. To the most earnest and profound minds of ancient days life offered, indeed, riddles which could not be banished. But still the former frame of mind was always possible and attainable. How different it is with us children of a modern day when we consider ourselves and our lives, if only for a moment!

For to us the world has grown immeasurably greater. According to our perception our earth has been removed from the centre of the universe, and now revolves as an atom round the sun, and the latter again revolves round a distant, unknown centre, and with all its starry host occupies but a remote corner in the universe. And those bodies which we call the friendly stars, which illumine the heavens, are, in truth, fiery volcanoes so immense and so terrifying that no human imagination can picture them. But we, ourselves, are placed between two infinities in time and space—the infinity of the macrocosmos and the microcosmos. And if astronomy with telescope and spy-glass leads us into the world of the macrocosmos and shows to our amazed imagination suns after suns, systems after systems of fixed stars

and central suns, and reveals in nebulous spots, scarcely visible to the eye, unknown worlds whose relations of time and space bewilder us, on the other hand, biology, with its microscope and artificial breeding of bacteria, introduces us into the world of the microcosmos, and teaches us the wonderful delicacies of organic life. Whether we cast our thoughts upwards into the world of the mysteriously great, or downwards into the world of the wonderfully small, we are always overcome with the feeling of looking into an abyss which turns us dizzy. Our perceptions and conceptions, our beliefs and our hypotheses—by the help of which we seek to understand the world rightly—all our ideas of space and time, of cause and effect, of atoms and moleculæ, of æther and æther vibrations, of cells and seeds, contain, each of them, a whole series of new questions. We, shadows of a day, are destined, it would appear, to contemplate the universe only from that side of it which is, by chance, turned towards us, and we are incapable of any real survey of the whole.

But within the limits of the infinitely great, and the infinitely little what a rich source of mysterious, inscrutable life in all its wealth, what a rushing, mighty stream of

events! We believe that we have investigated to a great extent the laws of these occurrences, and understand some of them; for, truly, the human understanding has penetrated very far in its bold spirit of daring. It has shown from what elements the starry worlds are built; it has penetrated the laws of the tiniest living organisms; it has succeeded in deciphering to some extent, at least, the history of organic life through the stages of its development on our earth. Yet, even supposing we had entirely completed this work, supposing we possessed all knowledge and knew all the laws of nature, we should still be confronted by a great and impenetrable problem, the problem of life itself, the problem of the concrete and individual actuality of this world—that this world is such as it is. We believe that we have discovered all the laws according to which bodies move and revolve in a system; but why there are just these bodies of this size, at this distance, revolving at this velocity, and arranged in these definite systems, we do not know. In all our knowledge there remains a final something that is impenetrable; we are therefore obliged to lift our thoughts to the infinite, and to derive the finite from the infinite.

And supposing we knew, absolutely, all the elements, all the foundation-stones from which our world was constructed, and knew all their qualities and powers, yet we should still be face to face with this insoluble problem—why are they precisely these elements and these attributes? And supposing we succeeded in expressing the characteristics of the elements in a definite arithmetical scheme according to the weight, number, and order of the atoms and moleculæ, there would still remain the question of why it was just this scheme and no other. And if our scientists succeeded in arranging all the organisms and living things of the earth genealogically, in a gigantic table, and in understanding their origin according to historic evolution, there would yet remain as impenetrable the concrete existence of this tree of life which began with the simplest cell-formations and ended with man. Modern biologists are especially interested in the fact that every form of organic life, every plant, even though it is in conformity with the law of its development, has something peculiar, individual, incalculable, in it. And it is this same riddle that confronts us everywhere, that meets us in human life, only with far greater potency

and distinctness. Every human individual life, however much may be known about its being in conformity with law and evolution, has yet at bottom something inexplicable, unique, never to be repeated in exactly the same form, absolutely impenetrable.

Thus all existence moves along according to definite laws which we can understand. But the fact that we exist here and in this particular form ever remains inscrutable and eternally mysterious; it cannot be explained according to reason. It is, somehow or other, appointed by some power; this enigmatical existence which surrounds us has emerged from unattainable depths, from an unbounded, incalculable Will.

And what are we in the midst of this mysterious reality, with our life and our struggles? What is our meaning, our object in life? Are we merely sparks which fly upwards out of the dark night, and pass away again into the darkness? And even if we link our existence to that of the community, the nation, humanity, and try to be content with the contribution of our life's work to the common stock of the human race, yet we ask ourselves, What is the meaning and object of mankind in the mass? Do we really march upwards and onwards

in our work? Now and again the clouds appear to lighten and we perceive something in the course of events that looks like an universal plan; but again the heavens are overcast and deep mysteries surround us. Tremendous obstacles to a definite plan; the wholesale squandering of powers; senseless, harsh, destructive events, and the powerful intervention of the elemental forces of the world are apparent on all sides. Is it, indeed, progress or retrogression, or from one point of view advance, from another descent, and on the whole an aimless oscillation? The strife between the optimists and the pessimists is waged unceasingly, and the more profound and thoughtful natures appear to ally themselves with the hosts of the latter.

Let us, for the moment, pass once more from the objective world to our own selves. Oh, if only we might lead, within the narrow limits of our possibilities, a life filled with a purpose! If only we could consistently shape our lives as the sculptor casts his clay, with a firm hand! But how unskilfully as a rule we conduct our lives! When we glance back over our life do we not recognise our lost opportunities and the mistakes which can never be made good? And how

cruelly did the rough reality of the world around us force its claims upon us! Did not many among us sally forth to find something truly great to conquer, something truly good, and how miserable was the thing that we actually found! The stream of life carried us to quite a different place on the banks, far below the spot where we thought to land. Thus we stand in the midst of a great, dismal universe, between two infinities, in the midst of a manifold life (which ascends from unknown depths) and all its problems; we dwell on the boundary line of day and night, between birth and death.

> "... We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on; and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep."

And now an anxious question arises within us: Is there a final meaning and abiding-place in our life? Is our own existence anchored in the depth of reality, or are we drifting about on the surface of life, like the foam which the waves of the ocean toss up? Are we only like falling, fading leaves which after a brief summer pass away from the living world to prepare the earth below for an eternal continuation of the aimless game?

We cannot help asking ourselves these questions, and longing for something beyond the unsatisfying conclusions to which we are led by a consideration of the world around us. This longing is not a mere idle wish or desire arising from our feeling of powerlessness and insignificance and futility; we are forced to it by an inward compulsion, by the feeling of our relative greatness, of our inward spiritual superiority to all the classified and isolated phenomena of existence, and we feel that we are more than all the things around us which we include in the term *nature*, that our true self is never quite satisfied, but ever stretches forth beyond this finite and imperfect existence to something that is final and absolute. And the greatness of the encompassing universe which crushes and oppresses us, which seems to deny all our claims to superiority, where is it and how does it come to us? It exists in our own mind, we conceive it; where there is no ego it does not exist. It is, so to say, the human spirit which creates and overcomes this profound, awe-inspiring reality. In this insignificant, contemptible human nature of ours dwells a will which is able to oppose all outward resistance and to pursue its path in spite of it—a will that may be crushed yet

is never entirely destroyed, and is never wholly inert when it is a question of what we call the good and the true. We cannot put on one side "these obstinate questionings," they are an intrinsic part of our life. Very varied, indeed, is the form of these questions as asked by the individual, and manifold are the sources from which an answer is sought. Some try to shelve them. These are the inoffensive, easy-going people. They have cast a cursory glance at the riddle of life, but this frightened them, and they turned away; they seek to forget it, and to spend themselves in frivolity and amusement and the gay dance of life. And they spend themselves in the most disastrous sense of the word; they deny their true self, do violence to themselves, and lose their true nature in the encompassing reality which drags them hither and thither because they have lost their centre. It need not be absorption in the coarse and hollow pleasures of daily life; it may, indeed, be absorption in what is called work, in manifold activities which seem so full of purpose but are really without meaning or value, in the eager grubbing for earthworms, in the amassing of useless treasures. Such people have, indeed, only trifled with the business of life. Because they were not

courageous enough to descend into the darkness and the depths of existence, and to tend the roots of life, they allowed them to wither, and so they lead an aimless life, a prey to all the chance currents of the moment, without an object or a support.

Opposed to these stands another set of human beings. They perceive all the harshness and the terror of the world around them; they long for truth and reality, for a complete, perfect life, for "deep, deep eternity." But they shut themselves off from the one thing which can lead them farther in this world—that is, from the crushing, overwhelming feeling of their own nothingness. They refuse to see the chains by which they are bound, and they believe in the almighty power of their own ego raised to a superhuman degree. Dwelling in the presence of death and amid the unsolved riddles of the universe, they yet raise the triumphant song of life, and think to find the meaning of life in this existence which their own enraptured enthusiasm has enriched and heightened in value. And yet how deeply they are to be pitied! Their fate forces them continually to climb beyond their strength, and to raise their voices louder and louder until they only utter

discordant notes. Solitary they pursue their course, like the brilliant meteor which, outside the laws of nature, explodes in brilliant flashes, and leaves behind in the world a darkness greater than ever.

And, further, we come to a third group: they are too earnest and too thoughtful to pass by the riddle of life, too wise and yet too cautious to squander their powers uselessly. But to them, too, is denied the gift of freeing themselves from their own ego and surrendering themselves to a higher power. They mask themselves in the armour of irony and scepticism of their own forging; they penetrate deeply into the problems of life, but their hypercritical intellect prevents them from yielding to any deeper feeling, their sophistical reasonings make them think that perhaps, after all, there is nothing serious and important in life, perhaps everything is only the confused sport of their heated imagination. We must not, they seem to say, look at things from such a one-sided, serious point of view; we must repress our feelings! As they stand for pure intellect and keen observation, they regard the material world as a varied, delightful drama, a bubble whose brightly-coloured glories we admire, well knowing that it soon bursts. They feel deeply unhappy

and envy the simple people to whom life is real and no dream, and yet they think themselves far superior to the older children and fools of the day at whom they ironically smile. And to a certain extent they enjoy the varied play of their own ego. They are voluntary wanderers in the desert, who lead a life of deliberate barrenness.

Above these stands another group which we will now consider — those who have accepted life with resignation. They have given up, once for all, the idea of a solution to a problem of which they are perfectly conscious. For them the universe, in its ultimate meaning, is something like a machine which pursues its majestic course from the unknown Whence to the unknown Whither; which acts in complete accordance with law and purpose, and is absolutely indifferent to all individual life even of the highest kind. They themselves have learnt to acquiesce. This modern feeling is more in accordance with truth than that of the Stoics, who declared, often with exaggerated and false eloquence, that this indifferent attitude towards the universe and its laws constituted the individual's highest happiness. We no longer maintain that we reach the highest happiness by this path; we admit, calmly and

with resignation, that this actual life can never completely satisfy our needs, and that there is neither perfect satisfaction nor final meaning in life. It is simply a matter of making the best that is possible out of this life, and of living in friendliness and in sympathy with all mortal beings, and of diffusing around us in this dark and cold world a little warmth, a little sympathy, a little help, and a little love.

One last group of men remains—those who exercise the greatest attraction over our contemporaries. These are they who preach the gospel of beauty. They say: Whatever life may be in its final meaning, whether the universe around is horribly cruel and harsh, purposeless and unmeaning, all the same we delight in this horrible life, for it is beautiful, it is sublime. All its riddles and confusions only enhance its wonders and its sublime flights; everything that is ugly and evil and wrong is only the necessary shadow against which light and beauty stand out all the more clearly. They look upon the great contrasts that exist in life as a delightful iridescence. And out of all the different tones of existence, from the dull notes of the depths and the clear sounds of the heights, from the full notes and the shrill notes, from the chords

and the discords, there rushes towards them a glorious harmony. They throw over the dark clouds of reality the rainbow of beauty, they delight in the coloured reflection, they listen to the delicate tones. The subtle vibrations and feelings which are revealed in their own souls seem to them more important than the rough matter-of-fact things of life which only interest commonplace minds. They declare that illusion is the final reality, and a dream the highest truth; they confuse night with day, and plunge with the greatest delight into the unreal and the incomprehensible. They can, indeed, address life thus in heroic fashion: Strike us with many strokes, kill us, yet will we love thee, for thou art beautiful, thou art sublime.

But journeying along their own road, and apart from all those who seek in different ways to discover a solution of the riddle of life are they who have found the answer of Faith.

We will hearken to the answer.

CHAPTER II

THE ANSWER OF FAITH

THE FOUNDATION: ALMIGHTY GOD

TO believe, to be religious, implies that we adopt a definite attitude towards the universe around us, one absolutely different from the uncertain views that have already been mentioned. The man who really believes penetrates, verily, to life's deepest foundations, and does not pass them by with indifference. He does not put himself in Titanic opposition to the world, nor does he indulge in weary scepticism and passive resignation. Neither, again, does he seek to delude himself over the problems of life by the illusion of the Beautiful. He accepts the universe courageously and reverently. He believes that it is a part of an intelligent unity, and he finds in it, behind it, and beyond it an absolute something which gives a final support to his life. Even more than this, faith teaches

us that we are related to the profoundest reality of existence in the very depth of our being; that we may gain courage and find our soul's peace in it, and that we are permitted to call it "Our God." All belief which in the long course of history has led mankind onwards, in so far as it was really true and living, has striven towards this goal, often by many byepaths and circuitous ways, and through the lands of shadows and of darkness. That of which the religions of all ages and nations had but a glimmering, which sounds clearly and unmistakably in the announcement of Christ's gospel, foreshadowed by the Old Testament prophets, is the fact that the power revealed to us mysteriously in the world around us is our God.

The phrase *our God* has a twofold meaning. He is on the one hand our God, who speaks to us out of the plenitude of existence, whose creatures we are, and before whose wonderful and almighty reality we are conscious of our own insignificance. On the other hand, He is our God to whom we belong, whom we are permitted to address as *Thou*, who draws us to Him, and to whom we venture to draw near in a perfect confidence which bridges over all distance between God

and His creatures. In both these respects the Christian belief in God is simply the clearest expression of ideas which have painfully struggled to embody themselves in the long history of religions. Throughout the ages the religious life of the nations has oscillated between two poles: on the one hand a feeling, often amounting to frenzied anguish, of the remoteness of the Divine Being, on the other hand, a sense of His nearness, which has sometimes cast respect and reverence behind it. Now the one idea was more prominent, now the other; danger and narrowness were to be encountered on both sides. In the Christian religion, however, both ideas are equally prominent; the noble and lofty edifice rests on two pillars of equal strength.

God is our *God:* He is more than we are, and different from us. This conception of God is clearly seen, even in the lowest stages of religious life. The thought of the Godhead fills men with feelings of fear, flight, and defence, with wild anguish which is capable of the most terrible sacrifices. In the old Greek religion we have the acknowledgment that "the gods are mightier than men," and the human presumption which put itself on an equality with the Godhead was regarded as the cardinal sin. The spiritual import of the

old Greek tragedy was summed up in this thought: The gods crush the pride of men. And how strongly the heroes of the Old Testament emphasised this side of their belief! He is the God who rages in the tempest and in the darkness of the clouds and then vanishes; the terrible, mysterious God, who has determined on the annihilation of His people, whose day is darkness and corruption, whose message a burden which overwhelms the soul, whose being is shrouded in mystery, whose ways are higher than our ways, and whose thoughts are above our thoughts. An entire book of the Old Testament is devoted to the mysterious, inexplicable God. Every line of the Book of Job strikes this note. It is true that in the New Testament, in the preaching of Jesus of Nazareth, the opposite note is sounded, that of the glad tidings of the ever-present God who is close to us. Yet the dominant note still sounds in unimpaired strength, and gives to Jesus's message its keynote and its power. The Father of Jesus of Nazareth is also the Lord of Heaven and of Earth, the wonderful and inconceivably strong God, who permits the sun to shine on the good and the evil, and the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. He is the mysterious and terrible God who cast the shadow of night and of darkness over His

Elect One's life, and permitted it to end on the cross. The greatest disciple of the Master proclaimed the same God: the source and goal of our life and being, the God who reveals Himself in mystery, who destroys mankind's ideas of wisdom and might with the folly and shame of the cross, in whose inscrutable will exist salvation and damnation, and in whose hands we are as the clay in the hands of the potter. On St. Paul was founded the piety of St. Augustine, with its fervour for God, so rugged and so austere, and its boldness which trampled upon the human being's own will. In the background of Luther's belief also there stood the hidden, mysterious God: "We must fear God above all else."

We children of a later age are, if we rightly understand ourselves and our position, specially inclined towards this severe and gloomy view of religious life. For our faith tells us that this reality which, incalculable and immeasurable, stretches before us in the eternally great and the eternally little; this stream of life, with all its riddles, is an expression of His being, the work of His will. We cannot estimate the limits of His creative power nor measure the area of His operations. Even if we unfurled all the sails of our knowledge, and embarked on the great ocean of facts, and if

we flew on the wings of fancy which carried us aloft to the summits of all being, we should not reach the limits where the mystery of infinity was revealed. On the contrary, new depths of existence are disclosed to us at every advance that we make in our knowledge of the material world and its laws. Every answer that we find to a question opens up a series of new questions; for every problem solved many fresh ones arise. The farther we wonderingly penetrate the clearer it becomes to us that the world, as we know it, which we consciously govern, is only an island in the ocean, round which the unfathomable waves of Divine life and creation rise and surge. It is not a definite unity, a whole; it is merely a section, a fragment, and behind this fragment, so far as we can comprehend it, there lies hidden the fulness of Divine being which is never perfectly revealed to us. The higher we strive upward and forward towards Him the more He seems to withdraw from us. He does not allow us to look upon Him face to face, and even the patriarchs of the Old Testament pronounced with foreboding that whosoever looked upon the face of God must die.

Daily He surrounds us in this world of ours with mysteries and miracles. We do not mean

miracles in the extraordinary sense of the word which a childish belief assigns to it. But, as we have already said, this whole, concrete universe by which we are daily surrounded is in itself an insoluble and marvellous miracle. It is true that this whole universe is governed by the inviolable regularity of law, and that nothing is outside its sphere. But to believe that we can explain by the term "law" life in its uniqueness and peculiarity is as if we thought we could drain the mighty ocean provided we had a large enough net. Every hour of real true life that we live refutes us with its abundant contents. Each new blossoming of an individual human life which is unfolded before our eyes in mysterious quietude from out the mysterious deep; which even if it is apparently insignificant has something peculiar to itself which has never existed before and will never recur, speaks to us clearly of God's world of miracles in which we live.

And now in contrast to this God we human beings are a mere nothing, the work of His creative power, placed in the universe by that power; creatures who take everything and must take everything from His hand; bowed in the dust before Him, humiliated in the

feeling of our weakness and insignificance, and of our powerless, purposeless will. Only to him who can bear with tranquillity the terrible seriousness of these thoughts has the Christian religion anything to offer. But to those who *can* do this it has even more and greater things to reveal. These are not confined to an overwhelming sense of our pettiness and nothingness and to a mere feeling of fear. There are two words which absolutely sum up the substance of our belief —reverence and humility. And reverence includes, indeed, fear. Trembling we stand before Almighty God, and we are not ashamed of this fear. Terrible is the reality of the living God when He comes on the wings of the storm. We must fear God above all else. Our faith is no weak and sentimental emotion, no mere eloquent declamation concerning the kind God who is enthroned above the stars. He must be hard, like flint and diamonds; yet He does not only inspire anguish and fear, He inspires reverence also. We may freely offer to this all-powerful, wondrous God honour and reverence. And feeling thus, our soul soars above the powerlessness of our own little ego to a joyous, reverent wonder and an adoration which delights to serve; we are carried

aloft to the heights of divine being and divine thoughts of which we have a dim foreshadowing.

Humility, the highest human quality, affirms by its self-renunciation and its voluntary, reverent, self-sacrifice the great and sublime reality of God and our own insignificance. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever." In this feeling of humility we are equally far removed from the proud and titanic self-assertion of the ego and from all sad and inconsolable resignation. Whosoever draws near to God in reverence and humility draws hidden strength from the fountains of His love. Security, joy, and power to gain victory encompass his being, and "this universe has become for him a castle in which he can dwell securely."

CHAPTER III

THE ANSWER OF FAITH

GOD AND THE SOUL

NOW we are confronted with another question. How is it possible in our faith to purify and ennoble that sense of sheer fear and anguish, that feeling of the transitoriness of life, which comes to us in the presence of God's almighty being, so as to rise to the feelings of reverence and humility? And we answer: We can do this because our faith has another side to it. Our faith does not merely impress upon us the harsh contrasts between the Creator's almighty power and the creature's powerlessness. With a great "and nevertheless" it throws a bridge from God to us and from us to God. "Nevertheless I am continually with thee: Thou hast holden my right hand." Our faith tells us that the Almighty God is *our* God; He inclines Himself to us, and we must rise to Him. He

belongs to us and we to Him, and we are permitted to say *Thou* to the Almighty God.

Here our Christian religion shows, in its perfect expression, a characteristic which is common to all religious life. The more strange and mysterious the higher powers—the gods and the Godhead—appeared to man, the stronger in most cases was the feeling of a longing to strive upwards, and the perception of belonging to God. And ever stronger grew the conviction that the Godhead desires to come into contact with man, that He accepts and offers gifts, that He listens to the supplications and entreaties of believers, that He affords us a final support and ultimate protection, that He demands from man the fulfilment of holy and inviolable claims, but that at the same time He gives a blessed reward. And the higher man's life and faith rose the more the nations and the generations—whilst purifying their religion from the material demands so intimately bound up with it—included in their belief in the Godhead their noblest and best ideas, their most sacred possessions and talents. Thus on the one hand they based on the deepest reality those things which they valued most, whilst their thoughts of

the Godhead were purified, and ennobled, and filled with a precious significance.

But it is true that here the greatest and most essential differences in religions begin. For what things has not the race of man in the long course of its existence regarded as of the greatest value! And now the task is set us of defining the peculiar position of our Christian belief in God with regard to the various forms assumed by the idea of highest value.

Far removed from the main stream of the religions of the nations, the Indian religions which dominated Eastern Asia have pursued their course. The people of India, pressing southwards after they crossed the mountains and thus separated from the main stream of our races, which shaped the world's history, fell after their conquest of the inferior original inhabitants into a dreamy, passive state of which history gives us no record—a state due to the enervating southern climate. Gradually there stole over these people a loathing of the practical life of the concrete world, and they regarded it as their worthiest object to retire from the varied life of the world and society into their own self, with its peace, and solitude, and rest. But they connected their thoughts of God with

this idea, which they regarded as the noblest thing in life. The Godhead is that great calm and rest of the One life which lies behind the phenomena of this motley world; and this apparently real world is only the coloured reflection of life, the foam cast up by the waves which ebb and flow in the eternal ocean of true being. When the individual withdraws from all the varied occupations of daily life which are so aimless, and therefore, of necessity, so painful, when he abstains from all definite exercise of his powers of will and thought, and absorbs himself in the universal Being he discovers in the depths of his own consciousness the divine, universal, illimitable, and indefinable Being. "That is reality, that is existence, and Thou art reality and life." Religion (from this standpoint) is complete abnegation of the ego; religion means meditative absorption in the Divine, entire surrender of self in the One and Universal Being. Thus there arose the religion which may be described as the classical embodiment of real and logical Pantheism—Brahminism, with Hinduism its corrupt offspring. And when we see here how the one factor in religious life, the human ego, is put on one side and almost reduced to zero, we are not surprised to find

that in Buddhism, that offshoot of the Indian religion, which later on, indeed, was to overshadow a world, the other main factor in religion, belief in God, was likewise lost; and religion became simply a vague longing from out the depths of our necessarily painful existence for eternal annihilation.

It is easily to be understood that owing to the ever closer contact that tends to exist between nations and civilisations this religion of Indian Pantheism has begun to exercise an influence during the last century upon our European and American civilisation. Now and again this belief has been dominant in the upper classes of our civilisation, especially when it was combined with the glamour of great poetic or musical skill. When, however, we consider the matter quietly, we cannot believe that a religious conception which seriously preaches the annihilation of all individual and social values would ever gain the mastery, or indeed any considerable footing, in a world where life is lived so strenuously yet so wholesomely, where human beings are for ever striving upwards and feeling that they are destined for great tasks, convinced that they stand at the beginning of their work and not at

the end. It may possibly be that these ideas have now and again met with passing success in periods when there was for the time being little activity among certain nations and in particular classes. We had experience of this in the middle of the last century. It is quite possible that owing to too great and exhausting stress and strain, which destroys our nerves, and a too violent hurry and rush, a reaction may set in and exhaustion be apparent. But, generally speaking, we may say that this whole world of ideas will remain remote from our life and its characteristics. Even a prophet like Tolstoy, with his proclamation of the worthlessness of all that we hold dear in life, is, and will ever remain, remote from us; he cannot offer us anything final and permanent, whatever else he may have to tell us. At the most his preaching can only have significance as a corrective; he can warn us against over-valuation of the earthly goods which we procure for ourselves, but he is no leader who conducts us to a new life.

The adherents of this kind of religion and religious life will be chiefly found in certain circles, by no means very small ones, where people do not regard religion seriously, where they desire and accept

religion as æsthetic enjoyment, and where men and women who have rushed through life and exhausted their strength and over-excited their nerves turn in the twilight of their days to these ideas. Such ideas seem to offer them a stimulating and interesting antithesis; they delight in the gay contrast; they revel in the thoughts of the nothingness of life, the impulse of which they have just felt in all the fibres of their being. In the daytime they listen to the march of life, in the evening to the nocturne of its transitoriness. Such people desire to rise a little towards the heights, but they will not pledge themselves to anything. We will leave such circles; no one can think that there is anything here that promises good in the future. Religion desires and claims man's whole being, and in truth the deeply serious Indian religion is far too good to be regarded as a mere plaything.

The progressive Western peoples, the conquering nations of the earth, have pursued quite a different course in their religious life. They did not seek God in the twilight, in a dreamy dimness; to them faith was ever united with the things that they held of highest positive value in their life,

with everything that led them upwards and onwards beyond material existence.

To illustrate this, let us consider the highest types of Western religion. Zarathustra, the prophet of the Persian nation that was striving for world dominion, connected the belief in his god Ahura Mazda with the idea of human civilisation. He dwelt among and influenced a people who were just about to emerge from a nomadic and barbaric existence into a civilised one, and he gave as the foundation of this endeavour a belief in God which had been revealed to him. He announced to his people that it was the will of Ahura Mazda that they should renounce their nomadic life and adopt the life of civilised society and its ordinances. He who builds houses for permanent settlement, who engages in agriculture and cattle-rearing, who extirpates the dangerous animals, who builds bridges and plants trees, who lives peacefully and honourably with his neighbour, and who leads a holy war against the barbarians is a servant of Ahura Mazda. Whosoever abstains from so doing is a servant of the devil and his evil hosts.

In Greece belief in the gods was united with the loftier spiritual life of a nation,

as was shown in the holy war against the barbarians and, above all, in the works of peace. Everything that adorned and beautified, established and made firm, ennobled and elevated the life and people of the Greek city was done in the name of the gods and dedicated to their service. When later, owing to the violence of the blows dealt out by fate, Greek city life gradually passed away, when the twilight of the gods descended on the noble forms of the people's faith, the wise men—Socrates and Plato and those who followed them—rescued what was essential in the Greek religion. The noblest men in the period when the ancient world was decaying and passing away were upheld by the belief that behind this material, visible world, with its difficulties, dulness, and imperfection, was a higher world which struggled for expression painfully and in fragmentary fashion in this lower existence—the world of the gods, the world of the eternal ideas of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. Placed in a world which they gave up all claim to rule, which remorselessly pursued its own way, such men lifted up their eyes longingly to the higher world, the lost home of their soul.

The great prophets of Israel likewise

raised their belief in the God of their fathers far above the region of the actual national life in which they exercised an influence, and filled this belief with a new and higher significance. To their conception God stood before them, prepared in mighty anger and harsh indignation to destroy the material existence of His people, and before whose holy and indomitable will only one thing in the world stood firm—right, justice, holiness. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

From out this world, ever striving upwards, the gospel, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, soared aloft, and human faith reached its climax in a new creative and Divine fiat. Here, on the heights, there sounds throughout this striving upwards a new, solemnly joyous and deeply potent note. The gospel announces a God who seeks and desires above all else the individual human soul. It unites in a security and a closeness hitherto unknown belief in God with the importance of the individual human life. It is the religion of religious individualism raised to its highest point. A new world was here revealed to

religious belief. The Persian religion of civilisation had quickened but little the actual individual life, and after the splendid life and influence of its founder had passed away it soon fell once more into a religion of the most wearisome observance, in which the ceremonial service stifled all individuality. The philosophic religion of the dying classical world set a value indeed on the individual, but it created no close connection between him and the Godhead. For the Godhead became an abstract, bloodless phantom; it was hidden behind the lofty ideas of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, of harmony and order, and no human belief can live on the abstract. The vision of the prophets also was directed towards the fate of the whole people, of the nation, its fall and its rise. Only very softly and timidly was the note of religious individualism sounded by the greatest of them. And is not the personal belief of the pious psalmist overwhelmed with the sense of uncertainty, with laments and weeping and sighing of all kinds, with a defiant and wild thirst for revenge, with manifold unsolved problems and unbearable burdens? When at last the later Jewish belief rose to the thought of a future life which should explain the problems of this life,

it sank at the same time into an impersonal, legal, and ceremonial religion, and dragged itself listlessly and languidly along the ground.

But now, with all its strength, the gospel proclamation bursts forth with "God and the soul," "For what shall a man be profited if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life?" As the new religion was concentrated and crystallised in the person of an individual in such a way that in the religious life which was dependent upon it person and idea were inseparably united, it naturally addressed itself above all to the individual. The gospel puts the individual directly under God's eye and God's judgment, and withdraws him from the protection which encompassed him around through his belonging to a nation, a sect, and a religious body. The gospel addresses itself to the individual with its claims and promises; it gives to the individual the right to decide the course of his own life, and puts the choice of heaven and hell into his own hands. And, just as in the words of the Sermon on the Mount, "but I say unto you," all the power and significance of the individual in religion is clearly shown, so in every word the gospel urges personal decision and choice.

"God and the soul," we have said, for the

individual human life was, indeed, of no value in itself, but was only of eternal value in so far as it had freed itself from its own egoistic material nature, and had found its centre in God, and the law of its being in His holy will. Only those who are pure of heart are to see God.

The saying, "Whosoever would save his life shall lose it," which was originally, perhaps, spoken only with actual reference to the avowal of faith and to martyrdom, must be taken by us in the spirit of the gospel in a wider and deeper sense. It means, really, that we must continually risk our sensually inclined and mortal life in order to win a higher and an eternal one.

It is in this sense, then, that the gospel speaks of God and the individual, personal life. It is not life in its unconsciousness, when it is absorbed in the universal nature, or life which has abandoned its actual positive work and indulges in sad resignation and the twilight of inactivity; rather it means the individual life in its greatest energy, in the active exercise of its highest powers, in its individuality and uniqueness willed by God and ordained in His decree. It is the individual life, foreordained from eternity and working towards eternity, for which nothing else can be substituted.

This essential idea has remained peculiar to the Christian belief. At the very beginning of its history we are brought face to face with one of the most wonderful and unique personalities which the world has ever seen —a personality which destroys the old world and creates a new one; so unique, so individual, that the question may be asked in all seriousness whether this Paul is really to be considered as a disciple of his Master, as he proclaimed himself to be, or whether he may not be regarded as the second founder of the Christian religion. In any case, we see that in this matter we are considering there is a close connection with the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth. "We know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to His purpose." "If God is for us, who is against us?" How clearly and simply, with what certainty and triumph, is the essential idea of the new message developed! When we read the seventh chapter of Romans we see how the new faith deepened and enlarged the human soul and its consciousness. Have we ever before been given a confession which is so profound, so subtle, and so unique in its psychology?

We continue this line of thought, and a few centuries later, we come across a wonderful

book which opens up new and unheard-of paths, which ventures to depict to the outside world the inner workings of a human soul, a book in which all external events are only of value in so far as they affect the inner life, and where everything is regarded from the spiritual point of view. I refer to St. Augustine's "Confessions." No other book throughout the earliest and middle ages of the Church has shown so clearly the uniqueness and peculiarity of the new religion. "God and the soul I desire to apprehend. Nothing else? Nothing else whatever." It was St. Augustine's "Confessions" which revealed to the youthful spirit of the new nations the rich world of subjectivity and the inner spiritual life—those new nations which, when they had reached maturity, were to be the makers of the history of the Middle Ages. Whilst at the Italian Renaissance the soul of man broke away from the idea of a Divine origin and won a new world by Titanic striving and determination, and looked at itself, sunned itself—alas! but for a moment—in the glory and splendour of its own ego, at the Reformation the religious ego was once more revealed in its divinely derived certainty and in its strength rooted in the fulfilment of the Divine will. After long struggles in bitter

captivity, the individual human soul soared to the freedom of the Christian, and now the mountainous obstacles which had so hemmed in the stream of personal religious life rolled away. But whatever is wholesome and promising in modern life is ultimately to be connected with the freeing of the religious ego accomplished in the Reformation, though it may be admitted that it was not merely a question of the freeing of the will alone, but of its development. If we pursue this line of inquiry into our own days, we see at the end of it the great philosopher on whom our knowledge, and, indeed, our life, to a great extent, rest, who appears to have renewed his glories in our own age. It was Immanuel Kant who taught us that we should seek in vain for a final support for the Absolute and the Eternal in the objective world of things limited by time and space, but that we should find this Absolute if we looked into the depths of our own soul and discovered the self-existent law around which the soul revolves. Him we may rightly call the sage of the Christian age—the philosopher of Protestantism.

Those spiritual movements which have so deeply affected and influenced the history of the Christian peoples, although they have re-

mained, to a certain extent, apart from the main trend of Christian belief in God, cannot but acknowledge the influence of its spirit, and stand in most active relation to it. It is true that the Christian religion, like the Indian religion, developed the phenomenon of monasticism, and this monasticism, for a time, concentrated in itself the best and most distinctively progressive forces. But what a difference between Western monasticism and that of the Hindu religious world! In the latter we have a weary retirement of the human being into himself, and a dreaming away of life in meditation and emptiness; in the latter we have active energy which gained new and valuable things, civilised the young barbarian nations, cultivated territories, cut down forests, transferred the treasures of an old world to a new, and in the solitude of retirement delighted in the beauty of this natural world.

If we study modern European pantheism (which certainly almost lost sight of the value of the individual life in its strong, one-sided comprehension of the dominating reality of the God-idea), we see what a great contrast there is between the miserable, pessimistically resigned Indian pantheism and this joyous, courageous assertion of the uni-

verse with its plenitude and order. Let us consider for a moment the mathematical pantheism of Spinoza; to him the individual is certainly no more than a number or a dot in the vast one and universal existence. But still he *is* a number, a number that stands in a particular place, and if it did not stand precisely *there* the whole world would fall to pieces. Thus amazed and adoring, admiring and loving, the individual raises his eyes to the universe and its great and eternally fixed laws: *amor dei intellectualis*. By the whole body of Indian mystics such sounds would never be heard.

The same thing is to be observed in the so-called revival of Spinozaism in German idealism. Here, indeed, spirit and Nature form one great unity, and with its æsthetic pantheism man threatens to sink into a noble child of nature. Niebuhr once called the personages in Goethe's "Wahlverwandtschaft" "innocent animals in a menagerie." But yet how spiritualised is this conception of nature! The whole universe is comprehended as a great, purposeful evolution, as a power which develops through universal growth to ever higher forms, and displays the fulness of life in the gradation of events which serve a definite purpose. We are, therefore, no

longer astonished that this conception of the world which united nature and spirit, but laid the emphasis on the spiritual aspect of the world, became gradually changed in the old age of that great world genius Goethe into theism and the personal religion of Christian belief.

Thus the rivulets flow away from the main stream of the Christian faith, some, apparently, to be lost in the sand, some to return to it. But the principal stream has ever remained the same—faith in the God of our life who anchors our being to deepest reality, to Himself. Or if we look at it from the other side, we may say it is belief in a spiritual, personal God. Jesus of Nazareth created a clear and illuminating symbol for this faith when He addressed God as "Father." He was not the first to strike this note; it was sounded before in the Jewish as well as in the Greek world of religion. But nowhere else do we get this belief in God the Father expressed with such certainty and simplicity, with such strength and conviction, and nowhere else is it so definitely connected with the individual life. This belief in God as the Father has always remained the leading star of the Christian faith. To what heights does this belief attain

in St. Paul's epistles: "To us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we unto Him." With what certainty is this belief shown in the simplicity with which all the writings of the New Testament and those likewise of early Christian days speak of this God! We need only to compare this calmness and simplicity with the false and forced pathos of later Jewish literature, which lavished attributes of all kinds on God.

It is true that there have always been times in the history of Christendom when the strong personal belief in God threatened to disappear. Already in the first centuries it was threatened with extinction in the confused mass of speculations concerning the triune God, the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son, and the two natures of the God-man. In Eastern Christendom, indeed, personal belief in God has been partly lost, but in the West springs of mysterious depths were once more revealed. Through all the abstractions and sophistries of speculation, through all the forms of dogma, the human soul struggled towards the living, personal God whom it could and might address as "Thou." "Thou hast made us unto Thyself, and our heart is restless until it rests in Thee." "Oh! for Thy mercies' sake, tell me, O Lord my God, what Thou art

unto me. Say unto my soul, 'I am thy salvation.' So speak that I may hear." And these notes of Augustinian piety are sounded in spite of the Papacy and the worldliness of the Church and its organisation, in spite of scholasticism and the ossification of the Christian religion into a system throughout the Middle Ages, until with the Reformation and Martin Luther this mighty *Thou* rises once more to the living God.

This acknowledgment of God as a Father may seem specially difficult to us children of to-day, for modern natural science has shown us God's workings and being in an infinity and a sublimity which dazzle us; and our thought, in so far as it is religious, urges us forward in the direction of comprehending God as an absolute Being far surpassing anything that is finite and individual. Yet it is required of us that we also shall venture to address the living God as "Thou." One thing we must make perfectly clear to ourselves. When we speak of God as a person and a spirit, when we term Him the Father of our individual life, it must not be thought that we have thereby given an adequate theoretical account of God's nature. We know only too well that all our language about His inscrutable nature remains mere

stammering and faltering, an attempt to demonstrate in picture and symbol the impalpable and the intangible. On the other hand, we know equally well that a purely abstract idea of God will never lead man to Him, and that picture and symbol are the only things, and the most precious things, that we possess, and can never be replaced by or resolved into pure thought. The symbol of God the Father which our faith gives us teaches that God's deepest and most mysterious being is to be found in what we call personality and spirit—perhaps, indeed, far beyond these, but certainly not in the direction of a natural being that lacks personality. When we call God the Father we wish to express the idea that in this concrete Being there rules a strength and a might which determine and affirm our personal life so far as it is truly worthy. But it always is and remains a daring act of our faith, transcending all knowledge, when, in spite of the distance between us and God, we address the Almighty as *Thou* and pray to Him as "our Father in heaven."

And now we will combine both aspects of our faith. Our faith shows us the remote, veiled God and the revealed God, ever near us; it permits us to say to

the all-powerful God, before whom our inmost being trembles, "And yet we belong to Thee," and transforms our trembling fear and anguish into reverence, humility, and joyous surrender. And, on the other hand, it prevents us from approaching God's presence carelessly and presumptuously, and saying the Lord's Prayer as if it were a natural, self-evident truth. Thus our faith becomes a blessed miracle, and a mystery, and with the early Christians we acknowledge both when we say, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth."

CHAPTER IV

DEDUCTIONS FROM OUR FAITH

PROVIDENCE AND PRAYER

DEPENDENCE on God and confidence in His personal care for us are intimately bound up in our belief in the all-powerful God as the God of our life. This belief is announced in the gospel with absolute boldness. The individual human being, so far as he turns towards the higher life within himself, so far as he uplifts his soul to God, is of more value than anything around him in Nature, of more value than the lilies of the field, the birds of the air, and all the glories of Nature which God's goodness so lavishly spreads around him, and he is quite sure of his Father's love and care. "We know that to them that love God all things work together for good." Our faith here touches a depth and a mysteriousness before which the reflective intellect of man must

tremble. It requires our utmost religious energy to live truly in this confidence in the personal providence of God. Wherever people have lost their feeling for the simple truths of religion in the cobwebs of human wisdom and artificial dogma they have dared to disregard the belief in Divine Providence, in the Christian "*Trust in the Lord*," as something of very little specific value. Those who do this know not what they are doing. One thing only may be said in their excuse: that in an age when men's thoughts were narrow and limited, and little reverence was felt for the mighty and mysterious reality of our own existence, the belief in a divine Providence was calmly accepted as being a self-evident fact attainable without difficulty by the common-sense of mankind. How far removed are these times and these ideas from us children of a later day!

There is no point which is more open to doubt than this concerning belief in a Divine Providence and care for the individual being. We must guard ourselves with all our strength against these doubts which assail us on all sides. And this we can do if we observe two things. First of all, we must look into our own personal life; we must shut our eyes to the terrible reality around

us, with all its problems and inscrutable mysteries. We are not called upon to solve all these problems and to penetrate these mysteries, "to digest the universe metaphorically." We are here to find out a way and a path for ourselves amid the great inscrutability of existence, to discover pillars to which we can cling. And, further, a second thing is to be noticed. We must not, as so often happens, compare our happiness and unhappiness and strike the balance between them. Who says that we are here to be happy? But we are certainly here to know and do the work which life has assigned to us, to stand firm at the post to which we are appointed, to develop the higher powers of our own life, to find God, and in Him the object, the measure, and the meaning of our own life. And when we thus acknowledge the object of our existence, we shall ask ourselves for the first time whether there is not to be recognised in the guiding of our life a friendly, fatherly Power which surrounds us everywhere with His care, and draws us to our life's goal, not by harsh, legal compulsion, but by loving promises.

When, trembling and hesitating, you take the first step, you find that life and the world around you begin to grow bright.

And in what you have until now called the blind caprice and arbitrariness of fate or sport of chance, in the important things as in the insignificant, in the bliss of happiness and in the bitter, heart-breaking, agonising moments of your life, in the light of clear day and in the darkness of anguish and misery, you will seek to grasp the hand of God, who bears and supports your life. He speaks to you; question Him, pay heed, listen, hear. Softly the voice speaks to you out of the eternal heights, like the voice of a mother calling to her child who has wandered away in the wood. Louder and more distinctly, more and more frequently it speaks to you, and seldom does it leave you, even in the hurry and bustle of every-day life. Undreamt of powers descend upon you. That terrible feeling of oppression which burdened your soul, the fear of all that can and may happen in this strange life of ours, gradually disappears. Doubt and uncertainty begin to pass away; step by step at first we gropingly feel our way, but ever more and more clearly our path in life is revealed to us. And now there begins to awaken in our heart that rest and holy tranquillity which is never disturbed by disappointments or adversity.

Even heavy misfortune no longer appears as a fate which overwhelms us, but as a task which obliges us to develop new powers; for all burdens strengthen the powers of our life, and tribulations stimulate our energies. And when through the heavy blows of fate God takes away our strength, bars our way and shuts the door, we must watch to see if new paths are not revealed, new doors opened, and we must learn to say, with St. Paul, "For when I am weak then am I strong."

Thus we are in agreement with the following pious confession: "There are moments in each man's life when he is conscious of a design which runs through his whole existence, a plan which he has not designed and does not complete, the thought of which delights him as much as if he had planned it out himself, and the execution of which seems to bring him blessings and peculiar advantages, though his own hands have not carried it out. He is free, as the chess-player is free to make his moves, but at the same time he is not his own master any more than the chess-player who is forced to move by a superior opponent. He is conscious that the end of the game will not be checkmate for him, but victory through defeat, and the nearer this

end draws the more impatiently he awaits it, rejoicing in the will, scarcely to be misunderstood any longer, of Him who has forced free man into a position where the highest freedom will be found, because unlimited opportunity for the development and display of his capacities will be granted him" (Lagarde).

This belief in the personal God who guards our life, so far as it really deserves to be called life, is, essentially, belief in a wonderful God who works miracles. We touch here the very kernel of the Christian belief in miracles; we see the abiding truth of the saying, "A miracle is the best-beloved child of faith."

Hence our faith denies a conception of the world in which the world would resemble an artificially contrived machine regulated in every separate part, which would revolve in accordance with law after it had received the first impulse from the Almighty. For that would be, above all else, a universe where belief in a personal Providence could not thrive. On the contrary, we believe that our God is present in all that happens in the world, that He is always at work. Out of the richness and depths of His being new powers and new manifestations continually stream into the ever-growing

creation, and human individualities are the centres of His creating and His moving power, so far as they rise from the lower material life towards the height of His being and nature.

On the other hand, our belief in no wise demands what is called the abrogation, violation, and alteration of the course of nature. We do not need this proof of the reality and power of our God, and, indeed, we consider it a sign of want of faith to seek for events in the world which may show clearly to the gross senses of man and to his intellect, with its rationalistic conceptions, that *here* there is an undeniable interposition of Almighty God.

On the contrary, it is an essential part of our faith in the self-revealed God who is ever near to us that He should keep within the ordinances which He Himself has decreed. We believe God to be a God of law and order, and not of mere caprice and arbitrary will. We believe in the God of goodness and loving-kindness, who has granted us to apprehend, at least in part, the laws and regulations of His operations, who gave us understanding, and does not arbitrarily mock at it. We know our God desires that we should dwell in confidence on the sure foundation of a known and controlled reality—however small

may be the part of this reality known to us—and that we should not be kept in anguish and apprehension by a crushing and capricious despotism. Further, we do not fear that because we possess knowledge, which is after all but fragmentary, and power to rise to a sense of security and to a control of Nature, at best but partial, we shall thereby lose our belief in the greatness and inscrutability of our God and our reverence for Him. Our faith only claims that, humanly speaking, our God knows a thousand ways and means within the limits of the given laws, ordinances, and connections of approaching the individual, surrounding him with His goodness and care, uplifting him to the community of spirits whose spiritual link He is, and raising him towards Himself. Our faith claims that this reality, in the deepest sense of the word, is not a law which crushes us, but Divine will, Divine goodness. It is Divine will *within* the law. It is Divine will which does not, noisily and with uproar, destroy all opposition; but gently, noiselessly, softly, and wisely, visible only to the eye of the believer, it operates in the affairs of the world.

When we want to form a picture, a symbol of Divine activity, we think of a

great, dominating, human personality. What is the secret of that charm, the influence of which almost approaches omnipotence? It is not to be found in the violent destruction of all obstacles, in the assertion of power. It is quite otherwise. We believe that this personality guides and controls from within, as it were. It seems as if it is to be found again and again guiding events and human beings. It does not compel from without; it works with the very essence of things. The irresistible nature of its influence rests upon this fact, that everything appears to happen spontaneously, to take place owing to its own impulse. Thus such a man expresses what the world around is already trying to achieve, realises the inarticulate longings of men, and embodies their unconscious strivings and tendencies. High on his shoulders he carries his race and his age, and swiftly carried along by the shouts of enthusiasm, he reaches his goal.

Again let us consider the influence of a real personality in narrower circumstances. What a wonderful, marvellous spectacle it is! We may, perhaps, be able to guess at his goal, but we shall not be able to foresee the path by which it is reached. Where dizzy and steep precipices stand between him

and his goal, and where the eyes of the average man would see no way across, he finds one and traverses it safely. Confidently and with undimmed vision, he finds, out of the thousand possible ways, just the one which leads to his goal.

If we once have the courage to think of God's being and operations as of the nature of personality transfigured, we shall then understand something of the mystery; we shall begin to see how God works within the law, in things and with things, yet in such a way that, finally, it is not the law, with its mechanical necessity, that is the moving impulse, but the living God, to whom every necessity of the law becomes but a means to His end.

Prayer corresponds in the practical conduct of our religious life with the belief in the personal providence of God. Christianity is the religion of prayer; prayer is its crown and its pearl. The central idea of Indian piety is meditation, the absorption of the individual in the life-spirit, the experience of identity with the universality and oneness of the Godhead. Our faith in personal providence breathes and lives in prayer in which the reality that sustains us and surrounds us with its goodness is united with

a person whom we can address as "Thou." Here prayer is the only means of intercourse. Everything else that was of significance in the other religions—sacrifice and worship, oracles, ceremonies, and observances—no longer plays a part in the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth. Sacramental observances also were unknown to Jesus; He did not institute baptism in His lifetime, and it is merely tradition that ascribes its institution to the risen Lord. He could hardly have thought of the feast of the Last Supper as an act to be repeated. But the Gospels tell us how He Himself prayed, how He went up into the mountain alone to converse in solitude with His heavenly Father, and above all, they tell us how Jesus taught His disciples to pray. The most precious legacy that He bequeathed to His followers, a bond of union to-day and in days to come, which may be rightly called the sole and genuine symbol of the Christian Faith for all ages and all generations, is the Lord's Prayer; and wherever Christianity has deliberated about itself, stripped off its ancient vestments, and destroyed old worn-out forms, the simple, personal prayer has again become the palladium of our religion.

But what is prayer? It is, when we

comprehend it in its deepest and most peculiar significance, a dialogue between our innermost self and Almighty God, a real and true experience. It is an uplifting of the human soul to the highest reality, God condescending and bending towards the individual human soul. It is a mystery of whose deepest and innermost truth and splendour we are, perhaps, only fully conscious at rare moments in our lives.

It is of the highest importance to maintain this point of view in order to meet an objection which is often raised far too rashly and capriciously when the question of prayer is considered. Have we the right, and is it possible, to pray for this and that—to pray that definite outward events and incidents should come to pass? It is here that disputes and scepticism come in which strike at the most important and holiest part of our religious life, and shake its very foundations. For an apologetic, wrongly applied, has directed its attention to this very point, and feels obliged to assert that the course of events and outward affairs is indeed altered through prayer, otherwise prayer would really effect nothing, and it would simply be mere feeling and declamation.

We must try to get rid of this doubt to

which an over-zealous faith has exposed prayer; we must establish the most important fact in our religious life on a perfectly sure foundation. Let us at once admit, quite frankly, that nothing in the outside material world will be altered through our prayer, that nothing will happen that would not have happened without our prayer. How, then, do matters stand? In spite of this, prayer remains an absolutely real and efficacious fact. Everything around us may, indeed, remain unchanged, but we ourselves, at any rate, are changed by prayer. And this signifies a very great deal. For God's personal care for us, in which we believe, would be perfectly ineffectual if we individuals did not understand and comprehend it, if we did not rightly interpret and understand the guidance which God brings to our life, if we went to the left when God commanded us to go to the right. Prayer, then, may be regarded above all else as listening to His will which is revealed to us, as the personal appropriation of His providence. Only through prayer does the actual world, with which God surrounds us, become, as it were, clear to us. Chance is revealed as God's own design, and the apparently meaningless in life becomes full of meaning.

Prayer and Divine Providence are the two closely connected poles of our higher life dedicated to God, and one without the other is inconceivable. Thus prayer becomes a very serious and a very real thing. Prayer means that we penetrate through the outward appearances of things to the truth and to the real meaning of our life which springs from God. To pray means to live truly, but it also means "to stand in judgment of ourselves," to place ourselves with all our wilfulness and our perversity before God, to abjure the foolishness and the selfish desires of our lower self. Thus in this universal and broad sense of the word prayer becomes a task of our life which we must never neglect. To pray is to lead our life under God's eyes and to accept our life from His hands. It is in this sense that the New Testament speaks of "Prayer without ceasing."

If our life is based on this foundation, this attitude will again and again be concentrated in definite prayers for this and that. We shall again and again think and feel that a definite course of events may be of the utmost importance for our inward, higher life—perhaps, indeed, according to our judgment, necessary for its successful develop-

ment. Now—so our faith tells us—we are not forbidden to ask God concerning the shaping of outward events and occurrences, and in such cases there is no absolute and permanent dividing line between the important and the unimportant, the inward life and outward facts. But, indeed, at each special prayer we tell ourselves that God knows what we need before we ask Him, and gives according to His judgment; and to every such prayer we add, what Jesus taught us in the darkest hour of His life, "Not my will, but Thine be done." And so our prayer of entreaty is but the expression and the vivid, intuitive feeling that in a particular case we receive our whole life from God's hands.

Prayer and Divine Providence stand together as ebb and flow; our selfish obstinacy must dwindle away, the natural man must be checked, so that the eternal will of God by which He encompasses our whole being may stream in upon us.

CHAPTER V

DEDUCTIONS FROM OUR FAITH

GOD AND THE GOOD

IT is an essential characteristic of our belief that it is bound up with the individual life so far as this is concerned with God and the higher things of life. When we ask what the important things in life are, we at once admit that moral good occupies the first and the most conspicuous place among them. Moral good and the value of the individual life are two things which are most intimately connected.

Let us consider, in relation to this, the value of human civilisation. No one can deny that civilisation furnishes us with valuable things and possessions, but they are and remain physical, material. Civilisation merely procures for us the means and the material for the building up of our personal life; it takes man to the point where the work of his own life must begin. Hence this civilisation may become an unbearable

burden, when, owing to the enormous bulk of its wealth and the breathlessness of its activity, it deprives the individual of the energy to lead his own life according to the law of his own nature. It may become a fatal danger, for it threatens to reduce the individual to a mere tool, to a tiny wheel in the enormous machine which it drives. When this happens, we hear, from time to time, the despairing cry of man: "Away with civilisation, let us return to the simplicity and plainness of Nature." But, in truth, to follow this cry would be to add a second mistake to the first. It is as difficult for man to dispense with civilisation as to bear it. Civilisation and individual personality are two powers which, for ever in serious conflict, are yet dependent on each other.

Let us consider, further, those things connected with human society which are of higher value than civilisation. We will first of all take law. Law has certainly a value which enters very deeply into the moral and religious life, but it must keep in its right place according to its value. The history of religion shows us clearly that a too close connection between religion and law injures both. During long ages religion, through the power of its holy tradition, has burdened the law with foreign

ingredients, whilst religion has suffered deeply by allowing legal conceptions to predominate. All specifically legal conceptions when applied to religion have always been harmful to it. For law, in accordance with its very nature, acts in the region of the impersonal, or, at any rate, remote from the personal. It has always striven to find and to establish rules and regulations which are legally absolute, universally binding, and only to be enforced by compulsion. It gives to human life in society its proper foundation, and thereby helps towards the successful development of the higher things in human life, but it must not be confused with these higher things.

Then who would forego the mighty value of wisdom and knowledge and truth? Woe to the religion which stifles the search for truth! Woe to the faith which shuts out free thought and investigation! According to our faith we are to worship God in spirit and in truth. It is, however, an old saying that has almost become stereotyped, that piety and faith are not by any means knowledge and understanding. That is quite true; all real knowledge and understanding ceases just at the point which our faith tells us is the highest point. It ceases when we come to the individual life and person-

ality. Knowledge extends to the universal, to the investigation of necessary relations and laws; the final living thing which is evolved is and remains eternally mysterious and incomprehensible. If it were to be comprehended by knowledge, it would no longer be life. The man who devotes himself to knowledge and understanding in a spirit of truth and single-mindedness must surrender his own life in this work of his; he must be "objective," and allow all kinds of things, people, and facts, to speak for themselves, he must be prepared to put on one side continually his wishes and hopes and his dislikes and his likes. In the building up of our inner personal life knowledge has a critical but not a creative value.

And lastly there is the world of the Beautiful. Manifold are the lines which cross and intersect each other and join art and religion. And in this mutual connection each has helped the other, provided that each has remained true to its own nature, and has not overstepped the dividing lines, often so delicate. But in accordance with their nature art and æsthetic pleasure lead to the opposite regions from those in which the life of personal belief breathes and flourishes. They take us to the regions where our personal existence is brought

into close union with the world of nature; they extend our ego, so that it beats in sympathy with the pain and joy of the universe surrounding us, and oscillates in harmony with the rhythm of the great universal life that pulsates around us.

* * * * *

"Spirit sublime, didst freely give me all—

* * * * *

This glorious Nature thou didst for my kingdom give,

* * * * *

. . . deep within her breast to read
As in the bosom of a friend, didst grant me.
Thou leadest past mine eyes the long array
Of living things, mak'st known to me my brethren,
Within the silent copse, the air, the water,
When in the wood the tempest roars and creaks,

* * * * *

Then to the sheltering cave dost lead me, then
Me to myself dost show."

Along this path must the human being journey when he strives after the higher things of life. If our faith reveals to us the deep abysses of our existence, presses us to a decision, urges us upwards and forwards, and places before us the Divine *thou shalt*, and *thou shalt not*, art shows us a world in harmony and union, or in the bewitching beauty of greatness and sublimity. In the beauti-

ful semblance and in the illusions of fancy it foreshadows for us the deeper relations of reality and a higher harmony of life, of which our faith speaks hopefully, as of a future city and an eternal world. Herein lies the ultimate possibility of an alliance between religion and art and a furtherance of each other's aims. But the difference and partial opposition still remain. Faith must not bind itself too closely with an earthly power which consciously builds upon the beautiful appearance of things; faith must accept this world as it actually is, must put up with circumstances as they exist in this imperfect and inexplicable universe. History teaches that art, seemingly in union with religion, again and again became "the betrayer of religion."

Thus the ideal of moral good still remains the most faithful companion of faith. It has become a familiar thought to us children of a later day that the value, strength, and permanence of the individual life are best secured in morality and its claims. Here, and here alone, the individual life finds an absolute and final anchorage. Here we have a power that is equal to all the opposing forces of outward circumstances, a miracle that is more astonishing and more profound than anything in the natural world

around us. In the command *thou shalt*, which rules our behaviour and our acts, we possess a bulwark and a shield which screen and guard us against everything in the whole world. For whilst we perceive everywhere in Nature the ebb and flow of things, that command of *thou shalt* urges us forward, makes us conscious of growth from a lower to a higher stage, and indicates that there is likewise a similar steady growth in the mighty reality around us.

But, on the other hand, morality is meant to be perfected through faith. By itself it would ever remain a fragment, a riddle, an unendurable, aimless burden. Who are we men, imprisoned and conditioned everywhere in space and time by the iron laws of existence, and placed in an infinite world whose depths we cannot sound, much less govern—who, I say, are we men, that we should arrive at the belief that we possess within ourselves a final, eternal, inviolable pattern, an absolute law of our being, and the capacity freely to shape our own life? Like the waves which wash against the rock and crumble it to pieces, these doubts, ever returning, assail the only thing in our life that is fixed and certain. And these would destroy the rock (and have already destroyed it almost every-

where) if faith did not approach morality and say to us, "You are not the sport of natural law, you stand in close connection with the deepest spiritual reality. What you feel to be the law of your existence and the higher life within you is the expression of the will of this reality which forces itself on you; it is the voice of your God, and the law through which He leads us all to the development of our higher self."

It is a characteristic of our Christian religion that it unites in the simplest fashion piety freed from everything that is non-essential, and moral good purified of all deformities. Jesus of Nazareth gave to His God and Father a title of honour which was not to be shared with any one: "None is good, save One, even God." God is good, and he who desires to find God must seek Him in the good.

But now the questions which arise urge us on. If, then, the Christian belief regards God and moral good as one, what is this moral good, what is its meaning? We reply with one word, "Love." "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself."

Love—at first sight there seems very little that is new and original to be said about it.

We must, however, comprehend it very precisely, and consider it from the point of view of the history of religion.

Love occupied a very prominent position in the ethic of Brahminism and Buddhism. "Everything that we do in this life to gain religious desert is not worth a sixteenth of the value of love," so Indian piety asserts! But the meaning is there quite different from our definition. To us love means a sympathetic active will towards and with another. To us love is trust and delight in something of incomparable value which we find in another's life. In the Indian ethic love is based upon compassion; to love means to sympathise with another's sufferings, to help to bear his burdens, to suffer with him, for all individual life is necessarily painful, purposeless, meaningless. Individual beings, having all to bear the common burdens of existence, must unite in sympathy which binds the sufferers together. There is in all this no common purpose and pressing forwards and upwards, no common aim; at its best it is a common desire for the dissolution or annihilation of the individual existence and its sufferings—that is to say, there is a will which, instead of becoming stronger and more powerful, and lending the individual wings wherewith

to rise, grows ever weaker and weaker and finally sinks into nothingness.

The word *love* confronts us, likewise, in the lofty civilisation of the Greek world; and here the word has a full and vigorous sound, a characteristic which is directly opposed to the ideal of love described above, for its roots are fixed only too firmly in material, concrete existence. Love is here the higher, purer, and nobler brother of sensual love and natural desire. Love, as it streams out towards us in Plato's symposium in the "Phædrus" is friendship, the sympathy of affinities, the rushing together of kindred souls. Love is the very flower of life which it fills with intoxicating fragrance; it is the harmony of spirits, not without a touch of sensual feeling, the sensual perceptions lending strength and intensity to the harmony, while the harmony ennobles and consecrates the sensual perceptions. To this genuinely Hellenic conception of love and friendship there was added in the later Hellenic philosophy a more humane and cosmopolitan conception, the feeling of a duty towards every one, towards even slaves and barbarians; a perception of the solidarity of the whole human race which derived its origin from the same mighty Power and was subject to the same laws of existence. But

these new thoughts and conceptions lacked, to a very considerable degree, the strength by which the old ideas had taken possession of the hearts of the Greeks. They rose to no lofty heights, they did not inspire great deeds; there was too much mere reflection and declamatory pathos.

Let us carry the analysis farther and see what love meant in the Old Testament. Here we find indeed the text, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," but at the same time it is clear that this command was at first limited to fellow-countrymen, and that love rested on the basis of natural sympathy and nationality. Only very gradually did there enter into later Judaism the thought of the solidarity of all mankind, and man was put almost on a level with a compatriot. I say almost on a level, for the above-mentioned feeling of national obligation was never really completely overcome. It is only in the gospel that we get the final and real freedom; it was accomplished quietly; the old forms were not destroyed utterly, but undermined. And we know how powerful these were, for we see how Jesus the Deliverer had to wrestle with the old ideas in His own soul. It is, nevertheless, a fact that in the gospel of Jesus and His personality a new and higher ideal of life

was given to mankind, which united man and man and leaped over the boundaries of all nationalities. A generation later St. Paul announced triumphantly the breaking down of all these barriers and the unification of mankind in Christianity.

In truth a great abyss yawns between Jesus' gospel of love and the conception held by the Pharisees of later Judaism, the roots of which reach far back to the Old Testament. The contradiction was felt instinctively on both sides. On the one hand the pious among the people did not understand Jesus' work of love. They saw in Him an unpractical and even, perhaps, a dangerous philanthropist. "He eats with publicans and sinners." On the other hand—however much it may be disputed—it is probable that in the Parable of the Prodigal Son Jesus expressed this antithesis. The elder brother, his deepest feeling offended and wounded in his zeal for justice and duty, who stands in such perplexity before the boundless love of the father for the prodigal son, was a symbol to Jesus of the correct society of the pious of His age. What was the difference between Jesus and His contemporaries? To the Pharisees love signified something quite otherwise from what it did to Him. To them it meant doing what was

right and straightforward, doing what another can rightly demand of us, not doing what we should not like another to do to us. The fulfilment of duties, reasonableness, justice—these are the pillars of the Pharisaic system of ethics.

The gospel means much more than this; it desires the text "Love thy neighbour as thyself" to be taken quite literally. "As thyself"—this means that we are to surround our neighbour, our fellow-man, with the same warmth and the deep sympathy which we give to ourselves. To love one's neighbour does not mean merely to give him what belongs to him by right and equity, as if justice and equity are the only points of view from which I contemplate myself. To love one's neighbour means not merely to further his aims, to make them one's own; it means to feel joy in intercourse with him, and by so doing to reach in this common life a truer, more real, and higher life than if we stood isolated. To love one's neighbour, one's fellow-man—even if we have no personal sympathy with him—not as our fellow-sufferer in the universal, inevitable wretchedness, but as a fighter and ally in the struggle for the highest things in life—that is something of what the gospel means when it demands love of its followers.

Is, then, this demand reasonable, and is its fulfilment possible? The coolly reasoning, common-sense intellect answers "No," a thousand times over. It judges that such love is impossible, or only possible, perhaps, so far as the basis of sympathy extends, but impossible towards mankind as such. The dull, stupid, commonplace crowd who grovel on the earth, and spend themselves in commonplace, every-day things—are we to love these; and not only those who are beautiful and glorious, who are healthy, happy, and strong, but the ugly, the sick, the weak, and the disagreeable—life's step-children? And those who try our patience a thousandfold, who often wrong us, who check us and hinder us—are we to love them? That is impossible; here it is surely our duty to hate. Love would be contemptible compliance and cowardice, or weak, idle good-nature. And, moreover, are we to love our enemy? Love of an enemy is a mere phrase of hypocrisy, or simply deceitful and concealed prudence which triumphs all the more certainly over the enemy by cool, calculating self-control and restrained anger.

The gospel replies to this *No* with a decided, quiet *Yes*. Jesus lived this love. He loved just the commonplace, ordinary people—just those to whom He was not attracted by

sympathy, who indeed shocked His holy and upright soul, and whom good society passed by with contempt. Yet no one can reproach Jesus with weakness and sentimental philanthropy. His was an austere, proud, and kingly nature. He gripped the soul of men to whom He turned in love; He roused and stirred their whole being and forced them to an absolutely new life.

The gospel gives us the solution of the problem. It demands and proclaims this love in God's name. Supposing such love is impossible to man's natural self, faith in God gives a strength which removes mountains and flings the trees into the ocean. With faith nothing is impossible. Now, this is the explanation. When a man believes in a living God, who in all His plans for the world fixes His attention first and foremost on the individual, personal life, and whose will and thought are directed towards a great company of individual spirits, between whom He desires to be the connecting link, he gradually becomes capable, in the great struggle of life, of exercising love in the sense of the gospel. This love is not dependent on the hypothesis of natural, human sympathy, but is based on the belief in the value of every human soul in God's sight, and in the Divine idea which exists

in every human soul, though often concealed by ugly wrappings and hidden in dross or distorted beyond recognition. Thus it becomes comprehensible how such love as this never changes into mere weak good-nature. For as we are conscious that we ought only to have pleasure in ourselves, and sympathy with our own life in so far as we develop this idea of God within us, we feel that our neighbour is only worthy of love in this sense. Love of our neighbour may therefore be united with genuine, passionate anger, for this love hates everything that destroys God's handiwork in us and in our neighbour. Such love as this may become a hammer and chisel to knock away all the barren rocks which have hidden the precious metal.

Thus a new vital element came into the world with the advent of the gospel—the will to love, powerfully directed towards the individual; the will to love, demanded by God and made possible in and with the faith in God. No one has, indeed, recognised this more clearly than the apostle Paul when he speaks of faith which works through love and of love as the fulfilling of the law. No one recognised more clearly than he how the Christian's love of his fellow-men did not spring from rational reflection, but from a God-given

strength and inspiration, from the enthusiasm of a heart filled with faith in God. St. Paul named this wonderful new power in life the Spirit of God. Christians are those who are impelled by the Spirit of God.

It is true that with all this we are only at the very beginning of all those difficult and serious questions which concern Christian life on its moral side. For now we find that the individual human being, especially if we consider his real self and his higher life, is most closely connected with the life of human society in its narrower and wider circles, in marriage and the family, as one who pursues a civil calling, as a member of a profession and a class, as a part of the State, the nation, and mankind, with all its eternal efforts towards the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. And again, these moral possessions of the community are most intimately connected with those efforts and labours which, broadly speaking, we regard as the work of civilisation. For all these efforts are based upon a natural, material existence, from which they derive their natural powers, and they wither whenever the roots are neglected. In the gospel of Jesus and in primitive Christianity these questions remain absolutely in the background. The gospel goes straight to

the heart of things, concerns itself directly with the highest moral and religious efforts of human life, tells us on what everything ultimately depends, and in its transcendental idealism overleaps almost all the means and conditions by which, and under which, the higher life of man works and develops. It has only impressed upon our conscience one thing with unmistakable clearness—that man does not reach to his highest development in solitude, but in society. But when the gospel speaks of human society, it is only referring to the simplest relations between man and man, and not (speaking generally) to all the complicated forms and shapes of a society in which human life actually moves and has its being. Only a new seed was sown which awaits development, the first impetus which demands further independent and creative force.

Thus, whilst in the long course of the history of Christianity, in opposition to its original simplicity, questions of human life in society in its narrower and wider relations rose imperiously and demanded consideration, the primitive, individualistic idealism of the gospel became subject to sharp tension and almost unbearable antagonisms. The centre of gravity of all moral effort appears to be

shifted ; the endeavour after universal good, the labour on behalf of the forms and laws of human life in society, and for the sake of possessions and things of value which here come into consideration, seem constantly to be of far more importance and essential significance than the activity and energy of love applied to the individual. But as this work in the shaping of human life as lived in society is again directly connected with the works and the acquisitions of material civilisation, and with the scientific and technical government of the material world around us, there is always a danger of the truly moral work of the human race being confused with that of general civilisation and becoming identified with it. And then, lastly, as this necessary work of the human race which is directed towards the universe and the universal basis of human life is, to a very large extent, conditioned by the laws of nature, and consequently is subordinate to other laws, the difficult problem arises as to whether the moral demands of the gospel can co-exist with this great work of our civilised nations, in which the laws of the natural struggle for existence and questions of power and capacity play such an important part. This problem specially presses upon us

children of a later day, when the work of mankind everywhere has grown so enormously, and has given rise to the conflict of international rivalry, of international world-industry; and when the national struggles of the races, ranks, and callings absorb all energies in such a way that the claims of the individual life threaten to be stifled.

In these matters there is for the Christian faith no covenant and no surrender. It will no longer deny the necessity of all such work; it will gain courage joyfully to acknowledge and affirm it up to a certain definite point. But it will never permit itself to become weary of lifting the conscience of the individual above and beyond all the busy life of man. It will have to hold up to the spiritual eye of mankind the great scales for judging ultimate truth and reality. It will not cease to tell mankind that the final issue does not depend on the abstract questions of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, but on the individual human soul in which these abstract questions "live and move and have their being"; that the final significance of all that gigantic work which we call civilisation consists in this, that the individual and as many individuals as possible in the varied and manifold labours of their life, penetrate

to the deepest reality and dwell with it in their soul. Faith teaches us to recognise that the value of human activity, whatever form it takes, whether it is engaged on the periphery and helps to fashion the universal, natural foundation of our existence, or whether it lies nearer the centre of all life, is measured according as the worker is faithful to Almighty God, who wills that we should find in work our higher, true self. It tells us that the highest value of our existence is not to be found in the moments of a great worldly success, but in all the quiet times of our life when soul met soul, individual existence touched individual existence and strove together for the final reality. It has the courage to call the great little and the little great, and does not allow itself to be bewildered by human life, which is ever growing vaster and vaster in its work and its opposing forces; but, like the needle of the compass, it points unweariedly in one definite direction. And yet in spite of all conflict and opposition, faith is, indeed, indispensable to that universal human work; it preserves it from becoming purposeless and from finally collapsing.

But this is not the place to enter more fully into the separate and manifold difficult ques-

tions and problems which here confront us. We desire to understand the Christian belief in its unique character, not to defend it. And in all that we have dealt with so far, we have not yet reached the highest and final point.

CHAPTER VI

THE SUMMIT

REDEMPTION AND FORGIVENESS OF SINS

THE Gospel shows us moral good, and our task and work towards it to be so far-reaching and deep that an instinctive feeling is awakened in us with regard to it—that of our own impotence and even of the opposition of our sensual self. The one always co-exists with the other—the Divine command which streams through our innermost being in all its majesty, and the knowledge that our earth-born nature revolts against this command, and feels it to be in contradiction to its own being. This contradiction and this discord are not to be argued away. For we cannot regard the evil in us as something that is not yet good, as a necessary stepping-stone to higher perfection, rather we feel it as a contradiction, as something that ought not to exist

under any circumstances; nor can we diminish the majesty of God's holy will or abate His claims. We are confronted here with the insoluble discord of a lower and a higher world, of *will* and *ought*. The gospel frees us from this lack of harmony by faith in God; its nature and its significance reach their highest point in the proclamation of redemption and the forgiveness of sins.

Belief in redemption, the longing for redemption, lie hidden at the basis of all religion. In all religions the impelling force is the endeavour of man to rise above his own small and conditioned world, to get free of selfish desires, and to find a surer support than his own self can offer him. Hence the phenomena of self-surrender, of self-sacrifice carried to the extent of sacrificing the bodily life, the child, and sexual honour, are frequently to be found in the lowest stage of religious life.

Thus the thought of redemption runs through the religions and grows with their growth. What has not mankind, indeed, understood by redemption in the course of the history of religion? In the province of national religions people hoped to obtain from the Godhead redemption from national misfortune and national misery. A classic

example of this is the national religion of Israel, with its belief in Jehovah the Deliverer and Avenger. In the Jewish religion of the Law redemption or reconciliation meant release from material and ritualistic impurity which hindered the individual from approaching his God. When an Israelitish woman had borne children she was obliged to cleanse herself from her impurity by religious preparations and acts. Impurity and sin are still considered of almost like significance. The ideal of redemption held by the prophets rises to a far higher level. The deliverance of the people of Israel is not the first thing that they long for; they can, indeed, even bear the thought of the decline of their own nation and reconcile it with their faith. But that righteousness should conquer and triumph, and that unrighteousness should be overcome—it is towards this that their faith in redemption is directed. Their God is the Redeemer and the Deliverer because He accomplishes that.

In the expiring Greek world likewise the idea of redemption plays an important part, and in the striving for redemption which here arises it means to get free from the sensual and material world, from the whole sphere of illusion and semblance, of dulness and

slothfulness, of ugliness and discord; to press forward to the eternal world of Goodness, Beauty, and Truth, to the world of the holy gods from whom man, in the best part of his nature, is descended. Finally, if we look towards the East, towards the ancient religions of India, we shall see that there the idea of redemption is very powerful. It means freedom from this manifold, diversified, and necessarily painful individual existence; in Brahminism it is absorption into the universal, one, divine Being, in Buddhism it is entering into the peace of eternal annihilation.

The Christian belief also is eminently a belief in redemption. It is not St. Paul who is the originator of this belief; it is very clearly pronounced in the gospel. If, indeed, the categorical imperative predominates in the latter, there yet rings close to it the joyous, clear sound of the message of redemption. For the gospel is the proclamation of God's kingdom, of God who is near us in His kingdom. And if this proclamation signifies on the one hand judgment and repentance, on the other hand it means felicity and redemption. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

And in the preaching of God's kingdom Jesus promises not merely redemption from personal misery and from the misery of national life; His redemption stretches far beyond this. A new and higher time is to come, and in it and with it a new and higher life; and this life has so little to do with the other, is so little commensurable with it, that in losing the one man finds the other. And this has ever been the idea throughout the history of the Christian religion. Wherever its leaders, be it St. Paul, or St. Augustine, or Luther, or Schleiermacher, have grasped the Christian faith in its fullest significance it has always been revealed to them as belief in redemption.

If we desire to understand the nature of the Christian belief with regard to redemption, we may say as follows: Redemption in the sense of the gospel means to get free, and to escape from the natural, sensually inclined self that sees in itself the object of its life and strivings. To be redeemed means to be caught up by the power of God; redemption signifies the experience by which the *I* is removed from the centre of the individual's contemplation of the world and is forced to revolve with its whole life round God. Redemption no longer means to us freedom from

this or that particular thing in regard to this or that external matter, but we feel that it touches the very roots of our existence. For all the oppression, anguish, and misery of life arise from this, that our *ego* in all the experiences of its life looks upon itself in its isolation and not on the will of the almighty God which is thereby revealed; and all these miseries vanish as soon as this presumptuous standpoint is abandoned and exchanged for the contrary one. Redemption in the Christian sense of the word does not mean, indeed, surrender to abstract powers and laws, be it the power of righteousness and holiness or the ideals of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, but surrender to the personal, almighty God. And finally it means, not a casting away and contempt of life, but elevation to a higher life. We surrender to God our being, which until then had desired to be self-sufficing and to revolve on its own axis, in order to receive this self from Him again, consecrated and ennobled. We no longer arrange the course of our life in accordance with our own will, but we accept the law of our life from His hand; yet at the same time we very soon learn to recognise this law as the expression of our own higher being and life.

Thus our faith in God is a very profound experience, and wherever it is so felt it is bound up with deep sufferings. To accept God, to come to Him, always means to give up part of our being. We do not attain to God in so simple a way that we merely have to bethink us of the primal basis of our nature and find Him there. But God affects us as a harsh necessity, as a strong compulsion, which we resist, as the sculptor's hammer which strikes the hard stone. Something within us—often a great deal—must be broken and destroyed, something must be utterly cast away if the new life is to arise. All true faith is conversion, though not of such a kind that we experience it in a flash, objectively and comprehensibly to the senses. But our religious feeling develops through the struggle which, spread over a long period of time, sometimes assumes gentler, sometimes more violent forms; which sometimes is most active, sometimes quiescent, but yet always exists. It is also said of our lives, but in a broader sense, "Whosoever would save his life shall lose it."

In and with this redemption which is accomplished in us when we encounter the reality of God in our life, our powers for good in the gospel sense of the word are now

freed. For the main obstacle which arises within us against the claim of loving our neighbour is our sensual egoism, the efforts of the ego to receive the laws of life from its own material, isolated being alone. But if this egoistic passion of man is entirely annihilated in the presence of God's majestic reality, if we are cast out from the centre of our own contemplation, and God is placed there, the road is now open for moral goodness. And on the other hand, in faith we comprehend God as the common bond which binds spirits together, as the almighty will who has appointed to each the measure and the goal of his life, and unceasingly acts so that those who recognise in His will the law of their life live together in harmony, whilst wherever this does not happen there is meaningless friction and waste of force.

Thus our faith in God brings a deep disharmony into our life, but at the same time it frees us from it. Whenever faith enters a human soul it causes the lower, sensual nature to rise in revolt, and at the same time it gives the power to overcome this opposition.

In truth, we may go farther and assert that in this belief in redemption is rooted, not merely the power for good, but the

permanency of our whole, higher, spiritual life. For is not this spiritual life of ours directed towards, and established upon, the redemption of our sensual, lower being and its release from sensual fetters? In all the inquiries and investigations concerning truth, when, transcending purely empirical knowledge, we declare this to be fictitious and that fact, this dream and illusion and that reality, we are in truth freeing our ego from the conditions and the barriers of sensual experience. We are proceeding with our own laws of thought, and though we have gained these through experience, yet with regard to this experience we estimate it by the laws we have gained, and freeing ourselves from illusion, we press forward, step by step, to the deeper reality. When we consider existence all around us with a receptive mind for the Beautiful, the Harmonious, and the Sublime, we control and drive back our directly sensual impressions of natural pleasure and displeasure, and free ourselves from sensual passions. And stepping out of the isolation of our own self, we stretch our groping, fumbling hands towards a Being related to us and comprehensible to us, who reveals Himself in the nature around us. And finally, when in the work of our life

we evolve a moral personality—a true self—then, to a certain extent, we free ourselves from the conditions of the external world, and we learn gradually to employ everything that comes to us from without as stones and material for the building of our own life which we erect from within outwards, according to its own laws, however imperfect they may still be. We feel that we are no longer driven aimlessly hither and thither by events and occurrences, but are strengthened in the consciousness of our own freedom.

Thus all our higher, spiritual striving aims at redemption and release, but it threatens, indeed, to break down without support if it does not obtain its foundation in faith. Carking doubts cling around on all sides. Is it really a fact that our search for truth brings us nearer to the reality, that our knowledge and understanding are equal to this reality? Or does not our knowledge and understanding lead us farther away from it? All questions of knowledge end in a final question which knowledge itself cannot decide. And all that we feel in the enjoyment of the Beautiful and the Sublime —is all that, perhaps, but an illusion, a *fata morgana*, a mere trick of the imagination,

and not the coloured reflection of a higher reality which is full of promise? And when we think to shape our life freely from within outwards, is that not only miserable deception? Are we, perhaps, only free as a bird that is fastened to a long string, and thinks itself free for a while as it flies about in the air, until it becomes all the more bitterly conscious of its delusion? What are we who desire to penetrate, master, and control the universe? Are we not beings limited in all the fibres of our existence, and, moreover, strangely powerless in our strivings and our willing?

It is only faith which gives the true basis to all our higher, spiritual striving; for it tells us that this struggle is not merely an emanation of arbitrary despotism, by which the little and circumscribed will opposes an antagonistic environment which would necessarily crush it. It tells us that all is in obedience to the Divine Will, a Divine obligation that is laid upon our being, which we, at the same time, perceive to be the law of our own being. It is faith which gives us the courage and the strength to illumine with the torch of our knowledge the hidden corners of existence. For it is our God's world which we acknowledge, and the laws of our thinking

are given by Him. Faith gives us the courage and the strength rightly to rejoice in the Beautiful, to stand reverently before the Sublime, the Awful, and the Terrible—for it is God's nature which reveals itself in all things—and to build up our life in accordance with the law of inward freedom—for it is God who gives it us. Or let us once more consider it from the other point of view; in faith we experience, with concentrated strength, the fact that we are freed from our egoistic, sensual self which stands in isolation. No power and might in the world are strong enough to accomplish this release. But when God frees us, then are we free indeed. Thus, then, faith works as a redeeming and releasing power in its widest application, on all our higher life and spiritual striving. In our innermost soul, indeed, we experience its power in the direct uplifting of the soul to God and in the unlocking and freeing of the will to do good, in the strength to love, in surrender to the good and Divine Will which is directed towards a community of spirits.

But now we are further confronted with the experience that this striving to rise from the lower sensual life to the higher

life willed by God, or indeed this ascent through Divine strength, is not straightway accomplished in us, but only amid constant opposition and continual checks which proceed from our lower nature; there is defeat and victory, falling and rising. We are here brought face to face with the absolutely irrational fact of sin and evil. For however much, indeed, the reflective understanding might force us to acknowledge that, because everything is to be traced back to God, therefore what we call sin is somehow conditioned by Him, yet our conscience will always make us responsible for our sin. But here it is not a matter for us of the theoretical solution of these final questions, but of the way out of this misery, which our faith procures for us. And so we say, finally, that our faith is a faith of the forgiveness of sins, and finds therein its completion and consummation. Everything that we call sin is an act against our higher and God-given destiny, is, therefore, a wrong done to God and His holy will, is an interruption of our personal relation to God. But this interruption must be put an end to, and this is accomplished by a spontaneous and inscrutable act of Divine love, by which He forgives sin.

The gospel of Jesus—and here we have the highest and greatest thing in it—makes us certain and secure of a God who forgives sins. In His most beautiful parables Jesus proclaimed the God who, out of the fulness of His lovingkindness, in fatherly love, pardons and forgives sins. In the prayer which He taught His disciples to pray the requests for the forgiveness of sins and for redemption are at the end, the climax. But Jesus did not merely teach the forgiveness of sins; He poured it forth upon the world. Only thus could the belief become living. For it is a belief that is beyond all calculation. Our reflective understanding does not tell us that God forgives sins, rather it tells us that God repels sinful man. It shows us Almighty God resting on Himself, on the hidden depths of His own being, who in no wise needs us, who offers no reason why He should not destroy the vessels of His almighty power which do not correspond to His will. A Divine power was required to fetch down the fire of Divine grace from heaven; and from Jesus there streamed forth the certainty of the forgiveness of sin. He comprehended the Divine grace revealed in the forgiveness of sins in its perfect absoluteness and unconditionalness. He possessed the

courage to proclaim, however strong His conviction was of the corruption of His race and of the human nature around him, that God forgives sins without conditions wherever the souls of men yearn for the Divine forgiveness of sins in vital need and with genuine longings. And finally, He proclaimed the forgiveness of sin as a free, personal act of the living God, without any mediation whatever through deeds, things, and outward acts.

He did not only teach all this, but He acted it. And wherever there still existed one last spark of longing in a human heart, one last faint desire for communion with the living God, He cast the full beam of Divine grace into the human soul, and performed the miracle of kindling new life in a dead man. He made possible the apparently impossible. Thus a stream of certainty concerning the forgiveness of sins has flowed into our world through Him, and continues to exercise an influence in a thousand links and chains through the communion of His Spirit.

And we must not hesitate to acknowledge that this is the highest and final point in our faith in God when we can accept and conceive God as the God who forgives sins. We know that we do not keep and preserve this belief as the result of our rational reflection, but it is

borne in upon us by the power of the Spirit which is living in the communion of our faith. We do not desire, thereby, to *over-emphasise* and exaggerate the belief in the forgiveness of sins. In the history of Christianity this proclamation often assumes a form which threatens to check the spirit and the activity of the new life which it should kindle. There are Christians to whom the thought of their sinfulness appears to have become everything; from whom we might get the impression that being a Christian consists in considering oneself a wicked person. There are Christian circles which are menaced with the danger that the avowal of sinfulness threatens to become no longer an experience, but a doctrine, a prominent dogma; especially is this the case when this avowal is united with untenable speculations concerning the nature and origin of sin. There is in Christian life a certain frame of mind in which people are so fascinated with the thoughts of sin that they forget there is a higher goal in Christian life than forgiveness of sins—communion with God and eternal life.

In opposition to these ideas, we desire to hold firmly to this, that religion, faith, is primarily a joyful advance and progress. To believe is to find God, and in Him rest. Belief signifies

certainty, joy, a feeling of being at home. It is thus that the religious life awakens in the souls of children if they are left undisturbed by any dogmatically introduced teaching. Only gradually do we become conscious of the other and darker side of religious life. But the former aspect dwells with us. To believe means to feel oneself placed before the good and holy will of God, and therewith before the greatest task of our life: "Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." That is the first and the last word, and it must never be forgotten.

But it is, indeed, just when we do this, when we place our soul in the presence of the holy God and His good will, that there arises in us from our experience the feeling of our insufficient strength, of our constant falling short of the goal appointed for us. Then, trembling and stammering, we stand before the Holy One, and know that nothing can release us from our misery but belief in the forgiveness of sins. And we know, further, that we do not only need forgiveness of sins for this or that particular case; an absolutely impassable abyss separates us from the holy, almighty God. For all our moral strivings and the work of our life are, and remain, at best,

imperfect and fragmentary. But God wills completion and perfection. From out of this misery of our life faith alone rescues us, which here again breaks in with its "and yet,' and tells us that God wants us as we are, if we will only let ourselves be influenced by His elevating power, by His mercy, which covers our imperfections. Paul called this experience and this certainty, which did not refer to a particular case but to human life generally, justification. Let us put on one side, for the moment, the word which Paul coined, and the speculations which, to Paul, were bound up in the doctrine of justification, especially those concerning the reconciliatory means of justification—Christ's blood or Christ's death. It is experience itself that is indispensable to the Christian faith. The believer needs the universal certainty that in spite of all opposition and hindrances God belongs to him and he to God; and he attains this when he joins the stream of religious certainty which went forth from Jesus of Nazareth, and flows along with it.

Now, all this means no weakness of our life's energy, and no yielding to a weary and exhausted frame of mind, but a deeper, more earnest, and true comprehension of reality; and truth and reality can never crush and

paralyse strength, but only exalt it. In order to perceive this let us once more compare Christianity and the ancient philosophy which together with Christianity ruled the earlier world. How closely, in many ways, this spiritual power, represented by the names of Socrates, Plato, and the Stoics approaches Christianity—how much on either side there is that is closely connected! But on this one point the basic difference is seen. The characteristic of the Greek classical world which finds here its highest expression is absolute self-confidence and trust in the goodness of Nature. Let us imagine a Stoic confronted with the Lord's Prayer—he would have been able to join in joyfully with the first half of it, but when he came to the request for the forgiveness of sins he would have shut his lips tightly, and his sympathies would have vanished. And even when, in later times, trust in the goodness of this world and in a recognisable meaning of the universe disappeared more and more, the endeavour was still directed then, as before, towards upholding one thing in this mysterious, impenetrable, and cold world—confidence in one's own *ego*, the stoical attitude.

Then there arose in this world, which was

profoundly ill at ease and did not know how to rid itself of the evils of life, a new and conquering power. It conquered because it had understood more profoundly truth and reality. And it announced that it was the highest thing for man to abandon this inflexible and unyielding attitude, and to learn one thing—the surrender of his own self, surrender as it was understood in its deepest and most vital sense, in the experience of redemption and forgiveness of sins (justification). The Christian belief brought into the world that was growing old the great mystery of death and re-birth, and with this mystery arose victorious the new redeeming life.

Redemption and the forgiveness of sins—both, finally, are most closely connected. If in redemption we experience, primarily, the power which frees from sin, and releases the will towards the good, in the forgiveness of sins or reconciliation we lose the oppressive feeling of moral guilt which paralyses our powers. In the Indian religion the deepest longing for redemption was summed up in the cry of "get rid of life"; in Christianity it was "get rid of sin and get rid of guilt and press forwards to a higher life." And thus, on this final point, the exalted spiri-

tual character of our faith in God comes once more prominently forward. Its possessions lie beyond the maintenance or the surrender of this natural life.

CHAPTER VII

ETERNAL HOPE

THUS our faith in God is entirely based on personality. We believe in the Almighty God, who surrounds us with the profundity of His nature and His works, as the God of our life, as our heavenly Father, who keeps His glance directed towards the individual, personal, spiritual life of man, and surrounds it with His providence. We believe in the God whose world-design finds its goal in a kingdom of spirits, the connecting link of all our higher spiritual fellowship. We find this God when we free ourselves from our lower, sensual being and selfish existence, and discover in His thoughts which He communicates to us the law of our higher life. Or, better, we find Him in letting Him find us, when we experience His redeeming power and His grace which releases us from sin. And what we experience is the freeing of

the higher personal life, and what we are freed from is the misery of personal insufficiency and guilt.

This Christian belief is completed in Hope. But Hope has as its contents the eternal value and import of this higher personal life. And as this depends, finally, on the individual and is nowhere present but in the *ego* and the many single individualities which experience this higher life, the Christian hope rises boldly to the belief in the eternal value and import of the individual life, so far as this has emerged from a sensual state to a higher existence, and has found in God the law of its being.

It must be carefully noted that this hope is the summit of the whole building, and not its foundation. And we must not take it for granted that those who, in an age so disinclined for this thought, cannot assent to this hope are, therefore, without the foundations of the Christian faith. No demand and no law must be laid down here. Hope is never to be demanded. It resembles the hope of the blossoming of plants whose development is patiently awaited. But, on the other hand, it must also be said that in the long course of the

history of Christianity the hope of eternal life has always been united with a living and strong faith. It is true that in the process of the development of the Christian idea of the Cosmos all those varied and fantastic expectations of a more or less imminent end of the world—of one great Judgment Day, of the bursting open of the graves at the trumpet call, of the bodily resurrection of the dead and the coming of the Judge of all the world—have more and more disappeared, or at least have been removed to the periphery of our religious life. But the hope of the eternal life of human personality pervaded by God's Spirit has been preserved throughout the whole course of the history of Christianity. It has also been preserved by the leaders on whom the foundations of our modern intellectual life rest. Kant's rational belief in God, which rested on a dualistic basis, and Goethe's view of the world, comprehending nature and spirit, as far as possible, as one, yet ending in theism, meet here.

This hope of Christian life stands, indeed, on a height not to be reached by rational proof; it is deep rooted in faith, and is only attainable through it; but through it it is attainable, and indeed faith is indispensable for its perfection and consummation.

Christian faith in God, whenever it was active and living, has always and at all times been a matter of *Thou* and *I*, however small and insignificant the human *I* may appear in contrast with Almighty God. The goal of a perfect, mystically quietistic absorption in God has always remained essentially foreign to our faith. But whoever has found God after the manner of our faith has had an experience which lends eternal value and significance to our life here below. From eternity our destiny was pre-ordained in God's all-comprehensive plan, and we were appointed to our place; an eternity depends upon how we fulfil our life at the place assigned to us. Everything that meets us in our transitory life we learn to focus through the power of faith, to harmonise into a whole which has still much that is incomplete and imperfect, but which yet is and must be essentially an affirmation of the thought implanted in us by God. And whenever our faith is genuine we are conscious in everything of a strength which nothing in the world can overpower, a joy and quiet composure which can never be taken away from us. But in every one who has experienced this truly there arises the joyous presage of the eternal character of this our life; he

perceives in himself a strength independent of all external events.

It is not, however, only the strength and the power, the confidence and the certainty streaming forth from our belief in God, but the unsolved questions (which, indeed, the believer puts on one side) and the troublous and painful experiences with which he is burdened that all point to the final solution offered to us by Christian hope.

Our faith bears us upwards and onwards. We are conscious of this in the favoured hours of our life when there are, apparently, no hindrances and obstacles, when our journeying resembles a vigorous ascent, when we feel ourselves uplifted by God's strength as on the wings of an eagle. But side by side with these there are hours of weariness and failure, when cast, fainting, from the heights, we lie on the ground with broken wings. Faith reveals to us the joyous certainty that we, placed under a higher guidance, are carrying out in our life a plan which was thought out for us by a higher power; and when we discover this our soul is filled with rejoicing, as is the miner's when he discovers a precious silver vein in the rock. But at the same time our hearts are filled with sorrow and consternation. For when

our life's destiny is gradually seen to be nobler we perceive how many mistakes we have made, how much time we have lost, and how many misspent hours and wasted opportunities burden our life.

But our hope tells us that a time shall come when perfect aspiration shall inspire our life, when life shall fly upwards as the arrow from the tensely drawn bow; a time shall come when our life shall be no more a continual seeking, an alternate losing and picking up again of threads. But its path shall lie quite clear before our eyes, and our glance will gaze freely over the furthest distance.

Through faith we have found God in the very centre of the universe. But yet how mysterious and hidden does He remain to us in His workings and in His nature! Through faith we build, indeed, strong pillars to which we cling, but round about us surge the problems of life. We think of all the unsolved questions in the lot of the individual and the nations which burden our life; we think of all those whom death has early snatched away before they had attained to a full and true life, of those who are plunged in the darkness of incurable illnesses and of madness; we think of the gloomy condition of a great portion of the human race on the

lowest stage of existence, of the violent destruction of civilised nations.

Hope tells us that what we see here are unfinished lines which await continuation, broken fragments which await completion. But we are to experience this completion. Now our God when we see Him in His working hides Himself behind dark clouds of mystery; but we shall see Him face to face.

Our faith points to the great aim of spiritual communion and its perfection. Here, also, we are confronted with difficult questions and riddles. We asked earlier: is progress really discernible in the history of mankind in the sense of getting nearer to the attainment of God's kingdom on earth? Will the nations some day live together in harmony? Will war cease? And even if that is so will there be a cessation or an alleviation of the less violent yet very intense antagonisms? Will there be a time when the merciless war of competition in international industry will cease, when the weak will no longer be oppressed and downtrodden by the strong, and class conflicts and class rivalry will pass away? Will the miseries of society ever be even partially alleviated? When the struggle for life is made lighter in the relatively higher classes will not misery and

poverty descend to those of a lower stratum and assert their existence, inevitably and without possibility of extinction? Is there a real contact and communion of the nations in the deepest matters of spiritual life, in the most important things at least—in faith, in religion? Even if we believed in the victory of Christianity over the opposing religions, will not the victorious Christian religion consist of a whole series of firmly knit organisations, in which an inward and mutual understanding is made extremely difficult? With the wealth of life we see how its tasks, riddles, and problems increase. We shall never master this sphinx! Our works and our efforts throughout the ages are fragmentary and imperfect.

And when we look at our own personal social existence, what hidden faults and imperfections we perceive! We run and hurry past one another, and do not know one another—"ships that pass in the night." Even when we think we are most closely in touch and in harmony with those who are dear to us, how often little events of our daily life make it clear that in great stretches of our individual life we were solitary and uncomprehended. The confused lines of our life are often so indistinct and vague to us ourselves; how,

then, should we make them clear to another?

Our Christian hope speaks to us of a higher existence in which spirits free from earthly dross will be visible to one another, will mingle in an inconceivably higher harmony, and will lead their life together on a higher plane; when the common life of man will have lost its fears and pains and problems, and will only betoken united effort and a higher flight for the individual, and God's will is the visible bond between man and man.

Yet, withal, Christian hope is no weak, emotional, and sentimental belief. Materialistic personal desire must be entirely cast on one side; the hope of seeing again our beloved dead—a feeling so often predominant in faith—can only exist as part of the whole belief. There is something austere and mighty about the hope of our faith. All material coverings must fall away; it will be, indeed, a higher life for which we hope. We can only faintly divine it. In this higher life will there be a continuity of self-consciousness? We can only suggest an answer to this question. What is the connection between the inner life of a butterfly and a caterpillar? In the awakened consciousness of the man

how little there remains of the impressions and experiences of the child's soul, how little we are conscious of what we were as children! "Now that I am become a man I have put away childish things." Some day there will be an awaking as from a confused dream, and what moved us most here on earth in our hopes, our plans, our wishes, and our desires will lie behind us in the far distance. We shall take over with us into eternity only a very little—only the really great and true and profound things which touched our life closely. And it will be the same thing with our life in society. Age, race, family, calling, position, nationality—all these will fall away from us, only those things in our personal relationships will remain which reach down to the very roots, there where souls come into contact with the final and eternal things.

There will be a great casting off of wrappings. Borrowed finery, vain trifles and baubles will vanish, and hidden beauties, truth, and reality will come to light. There will be a great exchange of *rôles:* the first shall be last and the last first. "Oh, Eternity, thou word of thunder!"

Beyond all personal hope, yet bound up in

it, there stretches something still higher—a vast and mighty prospect; an eternal, infinite kingdom of personal spirits, which consists of the past, present, and future generations, in which each generation has its position and its place. And we who are still in the process of development are not solitary in our earthly wanderings. We are already citizens of a higher world, and linked with it. Already we are conscious of unseen greetings, unheard whispers and calls. So we pursue our life's journey between the stars above and the graves beneath. "We bid you to hope." And over all echoes through the ages the majestic saying of the apostle—"that God may be all in all."

* * * * *

This is our faith in God. Finally the question may be asked, How do we come to such a faith? But that is a question that cannot be answered theoretically; it can only be experienced. But one thing, however, must be very clearly expressed. Belief does not come to us from mere necessity, it does not arise from the anxieties of our life. If that were so, it would be nothing more than a desire and an illusion. No; we experience faith, it is true, as an answer to our anxious

questions concerning life; not as our own compulsory answer, however, but as a higher power, which forces itself upon us, as a revelation which streams in upon us. We regard it, not merely as an answer to our questions and a release from the troubles of our life, but also as something which lies beyond it and leads onward. We look upon faith as a necessity which raises us beyond our former existence, as a harsh compulsion which is laid upon us; and in proportion as it frees us from the misery of our existence it lays heavy burdens upon us, brings conflicts into our life. To believe is to experience revelations of a new world, of a deeper reality.

Those to whom there has been vouchsafed in an especial degree the gift of seeing this deeper truth, of expressing it in words and impressing it on others, we call the leaders of religion, the pious in a special sense, prophets and founders of religion. But the mystery of the origin of faith consists in this: The mighty ones of the earth, the leaders of religious life, the great personalities to whom God's Word was comprehensible, and was revealed with inward certainty, flash the Divine light from person to person. And among all these teachers

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favoured by God, who have forced open the heavens for us and called down the fire of faith, stands the figure of Jesus of Nazareth, towering high above all others, as all eyes can see. All that we experience in our faith is at every point most closely connected with His personal life, and is entirely inseparable from Him. And thus there is certainly an answer to the question which has been asked; and although it is true it does not reach back to the mystery of the origin of faith, it points in that direction. We have and we hold our faith in God in the spiritual communion created by Jesus of Nazareth. Place thyself in the electric current of this life, transmitted by His Spirit, His Holy Spirit, and open thy soul to its influence. The Almighty God will so work that contact will be made and the current will flow through thy soul also.

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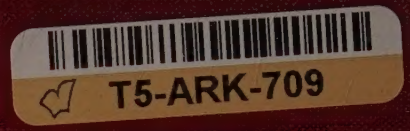
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